At last! at last! they had met.—Page 150.

GERTRUDE HADDON.

"ONLY A GIRL'S HEART"
THIRD SERIES

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"Beatrice; the Forsaken Daughter." "Bride's Fate." "Bridal Eve."
"Bride of an Evening." "Changed Brides." "Em's Husband."
"Fair Play." "Fatal Marriage." "The Lost Heiress."
"The Missing Bride." "Only a Girl's Heart."
"Ruth; The Faithful Bride." &c.

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GERTRUDE HADDON.

CHAPTER I.

LACKLAND.

"GERTRUDE HADDON! Heaven of heavens!" had been the exclamation of Adam Lackland, on hearing the name of the lady, whose appearance on the ship had so startled him.

"'Gertrude Haddon!' Why, yes," cried Sallust, "Gertrude Haddon that *was*, or Mrs. Fitzgerald that *is!* What is there in all that to astonish you so much? Did you ever happen to know the little lady? If so, you will be glad to *renew* your acquaintance; if not, I shall be happy to introduce you, and you will be happy to *make* the acquaintance."

"Thanks. No, I never knew this lady. She resembles one I once knew. She may be a relative; it is likely," said Adam Lackland.

"Well, I'll make you acquainted with her, and then you can judge for yourself," said Sallust, pleasantly.

But he had no opportunity of keeping his word then, for Gertrude, seeing her escort in conversation with a stranger, had nodded to him in passing, and gone on to the stern of the ship.

The eyes of Adam Lackland followed her.

"You said her name was Fitzgerald, formerly Haddon.

Both names belong to Wilde county. Does she come from that part of the country?" inquired Lackland.

"Yes. She was the adopted daughter of Gabriel Haddon, of Haddon's Ferry, above Wildeville."

"Gabriel Haddon!" exclaimed Lackland.

"Yes, man! what is the matter with you? We are not rehearsing private theatricals for the amusement of the second-cabin passengers, are we?" demanded Sallust.

He controlled his emotion, and answered:

"No; but the lady strongly resembles one I loved and lost years ago, in the neighbourhood of Haddon's Ferry. Would you mind telling me all you know of her?"

"Why, I will introduce you, if you say so. And then you will have time enough in the next ten days to get acquainted with her," said Sallust, cordially.

"Not yet; by and by. Sit down and tell me all you know of—Mrs. Fitzgerald. What a child she seems, to bear a matron's title," said Lackland, as he dropped into a seat.

"Yes, she must be quite young," said Sallust, as he sank into his seat. "Not more than seventeen."

"'Seventeen!'" echoed Lackland.

Sallust gave him a look, not of approbation, saying:

"Come, no more of that, old fellow; you startle a body."

"It is seventeen years ago since I lost the one whom she so strongly resembles! But, go on," said Lackland.

Sallust Rowley told all he had heard of the story of Gertrude. He spoke of the flood in the valley of the Wilde River on the night of the fifteenth of July, more than seventeen years before; of the travellers who halted on the opposite shore of the Wilde and hailed the ferry-boats to be taken over; of the impossibility of bringing them across in so terrible a storm; of the morning after the flood, when the sun rose on a lake, where it had set upon a valley, the Wilde River having overflowed its banks, covering all the ground of the vale between the two mountains.

He told how a child was found, fast asleep in its cradle, floated upon the flood, and landed at the foot of Gabriel Haddon's garden; how the old ferryman had taken the

child, adopted her and brought her up as his own; how he had given her a first-class education, but no accomplishments.

"Stop! for Heaven's sake, stop!" exclaimed Lackland. "Was no clue found to the parentage of this child?"

"None at all. It was at first supposed she was the child of a woman who was rescued from the river at Wildeville and resuscitated; but the woman denied all connection with her; and it was supposed she belonged to the travellers who hailed the ferry on the night of the flood, and failed to get across; but no one could say for a certainty, because they were never heard of, and must have been swept down the river."

"Were no dead bodies recovered, then?"

"Yes, lots; they were all people known in the neighbourhood; many were drowned whose bodies never were recovered, and must have been carried off, Lord only knows how far down the river."

"The old ferryman brought her up as his daughter?"

"And educated her; and when he died he left her all his property—a good property now; but if the railroad crosses there, it will be a fortune; for a town will certainly gather round the depot which will be at Haddon's Ferry. *She* doesn't need any more fortune than she has got, for she is married to Fitzgerald of the Summit, and he belongs to one of the wealthiest as well as one of the oldest families in the State."

"Then she is the wife of Colonel Fitzgerald?"

"Yes, of course; didn't I tell you so?"

"You did. Can it be possible that—But no; a coincidence; some relationship — everybody is related to everybody else in Wilde county," murmured the backwoodsman.

"What are you muttering about, Lackland? Talking to the devil, as my old nurse used to say when she caught any one talking to himself?"

"A bad habit of thinking aloud, that I contracted in the silent solitude of the Western plains, where one must hear his own voice, or grow deaf and dumb for want of practice," answered Lackland.

"A bad habit to import into civilized society, Lackland. You ought to have left it off with your bear-skins;

people will take you for a lunatic if you practice it here. Come—shall I introduce you to Mrs. Fitzgerald?"

"Not yet. Tell me where is her husband? How comes it she is here alone, or only under your protection?"

"Why, goodness gracious, I did tell you!"

"I beg pardon, you mistake."

"Well, I thought I did! Didn't I tell you I was taking to America a lady whom I had rescued from the sea, after the loss of the steamship *Messenger* by fire in the Straits of Dover?"

"Yes, you told me that. Is this the lady you saved?"

"To be sure she is—who else?"

"You saved the wife of Gerald Fitzgerald from the sea?" inquired Lackland.

"Yes, I did," answered Sallust.

"Then, where was her husband, and what was he doing?" demanded Lackland.

"Oh, he was there, but busy saving another woman."

"This needs explanation," said Lackland, frowning.

"So I thought, and so she explained it to me. She says Fitzgerald knew she could swim, and knew the other woman could not, and must perish without his help; so he left Gertrude to keep herself up until he should have put the other woman into the relief-boat, after which he meant to return for his wife."

"Did he do so?"

"No, there was no time. She went down immediately: and if I hadn't seen it, and swam to the spot and dived for her and brought her up, she would have been drowned. I managed to support her until we were picked up by a fishing-smack, and taken to St. Margaret's Bay, where there is a fishing village. There she recovered. But she and myself were both supposed to be dead, for in the next day's *Times* I read our names in the list of the lost."

"That was pleasant."

"Wasn't it? Mrs. Fitzgerald, as soon as she came to herself, was anxious to follow her husband; but as we had lost everything we had on the *Messenger*, and we were sheltered only by a fisherman's family, we had to wait until I could get some conveyance to Dover, and communicate with our consul, who cashed my check on my

London bankers, and so gave me the means of taking Mrs. Fitzgerald to London. There we were all right; for we had read in the papers that the survivors of the *Messenger* had been taken on board the *Mary Jane*, bound from Havre to London, and we had seen Colonel Fitzgerald's name among the saved. Mrs. Fitzgerald knew she could hear of the colonel at the lodgings of a clergyman who had been their neighbour and friend in Wilde county, and who was staying in lodgings in Hollis Street, Regent Square. So, on reaching London, we went to Dr. Goodwin's lodgings; but they had gone—the colonel and the doctor—and on further inquiry we found that they had both sailed in the *Europa* from Liverpool, bound to New York, on that very morning."

"That must have been a great disappointment to the lady."

"I believe you. She's a regular brick! but it liked to have done for her. That wasn't the worst of it. We were told if we would take the Irish mail to Holyhead we might overtake them at Queenstown."

"Well, and why didn't you?"

"Because we missed the train, and in missing that, missed the very last chance."

"But that was very careless."

"No, it wasn't. As soon as we heard the news at the shipping office we drove to Euston Square, where we arrived five minutes too late for the Irish mail."

"I wonder this second disappointment had not overwhelmed madam."

"So do I; but she's a brick! Well, the next best thing we could do was to get berths in the next steamer —this one. We could not get them in the first-cabin at any price, but we could get them here in the second-cabin, so that is the reason we are here, and a lady of Mrs. Fitzgerald's rank finds herself in such an humble position."

"Colonel Fitzgerald knows nothing of his wife's rescue?"

"Nothing. He must believe her to be drowned, as he would see her name as well as mine, in the list of dead."

"Certainly."

"I don't envy his feelings. Sorrow is hard to bear,

but when sorrow is embittered by remorse, it becomes unbearable."

"I should like to be a looker-on at their approaching meeting. What a shock of joy it will give him."

"I don't know that," said Sallust.

"How? You don't know?" exclaimed Lackland.

"I don't. You see he *did* leave her struggling in the water, while he went to save another woman, and that woman was Miss Geraldine Fitzgerald, a beauty of the first water, who was his cousin, and his long betrothed. And he loved her as hard as a horse can kick. But she had a temper of her own. She was gun cotton—nitro-glycerine! And she led him a life. But why he left her for Gertrude Haddon is more than I can tell, unless he did it in anger. You see he left Gertrude struggling in the sea, and rushed to save Geraldine, and he *did* save Geraldine. There's no getting out of that, though I don't envy his feelings, for he must have the conscience of a murderer."

"Then he will feel relieved, when he finds the wife he left to die, is alive, and will be grateful to you for having saved her."

"I am not so sure of that! If remorse was repentance, he might. But remorse is not repentance. For, Miss Geraldine Fitzgerald, this first love of his, is the companion of his voyage home!"

"Oh!"

"Yes. The young lady goes over ostensibly under the protection of the Rev. Dr. Goodwin: but, really, that's bosh! She chooses to go over because Gerald is going, and because Gerald is a widower (as she supposes.) Now, you know, 'old coals are soon kindled,' as the old saying says. 'Heap o' sense in these old sayings,' as my old friend Jessie used to remark. If Gerald Fitzgerald's humble wife should come to life, as those same old coals are kindled into a blaze, it will throw cold water on them, wouldn't it?" inquired Sallust.

"I cannot believe my honoured friend Fitzgerald could so soon forget his lovely wife, if he has any cause of self-reproach for his abandonment of her; but I am inclined to take the same view of his conduct that his wife took, and she must know him better than we do. I am inclined to think he never meant to abandon her, but

only to rescue her more helpless companion in peril, and then to come after her; he felt convinced she could keep herself up until his return from placing his cousin in the boat. In any case he must suffer, if not remorse for a crime, regret for a fatal mistake; and when he discovers that his wife, whom he supposed to be dead, is living, and that you have been her preserver, his soul will be filled with joy and gratitude," said Lackland.

"Shall I introduce you to Mrs. Fitzgerald, Lackland?"

"If you please," replied the elder man.

Both went towards the forward deck, where Gertrude stood gazing out on the sea, her head still rapped in the white "cloud," and her drapery blown behind by the wind, which was dead ahead. Before they reached there, Gertrude turned and left the deck and disappeared within her stateroom.

"I suppose she found it too fresh up here this February day for her constitution; but she will be at dinner, and we will sit at the same table, and you can become acquainted with her," said Sallust.

Adam Lackland found himself the only man on deck with the exception of the ship's hands. The cold wind had driven every passenger into the cabin. Lackland paced the deck in a sorrowful mood. The sight of the young creature who bore so vivid a resemblance to her he had loved and lost so long ago, recalled too painfully his youth and forfeited joys.

As he walked back and forth, with his head on his chest, he reviewed his wasted life—his froward boyhood that neither parents nor teachers could train; his reckless manhood that sorrow could not discipline; and his decline of life stained with crime—with blood guiltiness! Yes, the jury had acquitted him of murder, in having rid the world of a destroyer of innocence, and the judge had discharged him a vindicated man, and public opinion had approved the action of the court. But his own soul! Before his conscience he stood a convicted murderer. Peace had fled from him forever more.

So many people had shaken his homicidal hand, and said to him: "You did right to take the law into your own hand, Lackland, and we honour you for it! If other good men were like you, these invaders of domestic peace would soon be exterminated from the earth!"

But this taking the law in his own hands had caused him to fall under the mightier law of the soul! In slaying his enemy he had slain his peace. And he must suffer, let the world applaud as it might.

Little of this anguish did the outside world see. Adam Lackland had been a grave man, now he seemed graver than before. That was all that appeared to those who conversed with him. To-day another subject of anxiety divided with his remorse the task of torturing him—his meeting with Gertrude Fitzgerald. Who was she?

She seemed the image of his fair young wife, who went down in all her youth and beauty in the flood of the Wilde, seventeen years before. And she had been found floating in her cradle among the water-lilies. Could she be the child whom he had believed to have been drowned with her mother? When he recalled the scene and circumstances of that catastrophe, he felt that nothing short of a miracle could have rescued his child from death. Yet no one knew who Gertrude was! Nor could it be known now, after all those years, in which investigation had failed to trace her parentage! As the child of her mother, she would be the heiress of half Wilde county. As the child of her father, she would inherit nothing but — He sighed and groaned.

The gong for dinner recalled him to life. He turned to the saloon of the second cabin, not that he wished to dine, but he wished to meet again that face which haunted his memory like the resurrection of the dead past.

He found Sallust Rowley standing at the foot of one of the tables, and noticed he had taken two places, one on the right and one on the left of his seat.

"Come, Lackland! I have secured three seats together for our parts," exclaimed the young man.

"Where is Mrs. Fitzgerald?" inquired Lackland.

"Oh, I'm looking for her. See! there is nobody here but ourselves and two or three other men," said Sallust.

"Perhaps she does not like to grope her way about the ship alone, as it is rolling so heavily," replied Lackland.

"That's so," assented Sallust. "I'll knock at her stateroom door, and if she is ready, I will fetch her. It is rough, and getting rougher. I shouldn't wonder if we

have some dirty weather before we get to Queenstown," he added, as he reeled off to the staterooms.

Lackland waited for his return with Gertrude. Meanwhile the saloon began to fill with other passengers—all men—who took their places at the various little tables.

In about ten minutes Sallust returned alone, reeled to the table and fell into his seat.

"Where is Mrs. Fitzgerald?" inquired Lackland.

"In her berth—sea-sick," answered Sallust. "Steward! give me a glass of brandy! Don't believe me to be a habitual toper, Lackland, because I am not; but I do begin to feel so queer!" added Mr. Rowley.

Before the steward could bring the restorative, Sallust sprang from his seat and vanished from sight.

He did not re-appear at the dinner-table, nor on deck, nor at tea, nor at the supper. Lackland did not see him again until bed-time, when he found Sallust heaving in all the agonies of sea-sickness in one of the berths of the stateroom.

Gertrude, in her own room, was in no better condition of body, though in a more patient frame of mind. She was attended by the stewardess, who was won to the service by the liberality of her hand. The *Zanzibar* had a bad night of it in the Channel. The wind blew a gale; the ship tossed; the passengers all grew sick. But their troubles ended with that rough night.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ICE.

SUNRISE found the *Zanzibar* anchored in the Cove of Cork.

Feeling refreshed, Gertrude sat up in her berth and pushed aside the slide that covered her port window, and she recognized the scene which had excited her admiration when she had first beheld it, in company of her husband.

Then she washed and dressed herself, tied a cloud over her head, wrapped a warm shawl around her shoulders, and went on deck.

Sallust Rowley was there, and on seeing Gertrude, he hastened to meet her.

"Good-morning!" he said, as he offered her his arm. "I hope you have recovered from your sea-sickness."

"Quite, thanks. And you?"

"Oh! I'm as right as a trivet! Glorious scene this! But you've been here before?" he observed, as he led her forward out on the harbour.

"Oh, yes, when we first came over," answered Gertrude, as she stood leaning over the bulwarks and looking out on the scene of which, she thought, she never could tire.

"Cousin Gertrude, you saw me speaking with an elderly cove on deck yesterday, didn't you?" he asked.

"I observed you in conversation with a fine-looking man, who reminded me of Colonel Fitzgerald," said Gertrude.

"Well, now, there certainly is a likeness and no mistake. Who do you think he was?"

"I am sure I cannot think."

"Well, he was Lackland, the man who was tried for his life two years ago, for the killing of Buckhurst."

Gertrude's dark eyes contracted with pain and horror.

"Oh, it isn't catching. It can't be carried in the clothes. You needn't draw off in alarm," said Sallust.

"I am sorry for that man, Sallust. I did see in the view I got of his face, that he had some sorrow, and now I know what it is. I am sorry for him," said Gertrude.

"Bosh!—I mean that there is no need to pity Mr. Lackland. He has been honourably acquitted by a jury, and more than vindicated by the opinion of the world," cried Sallust. "Well, here he is on deck, and coming right towards us. Will you let me introduce him to you?"

"Certainly, if he wishes you to do so," said Gertrude.

Lackland came up, and stood before them. Gertrude lifted her eyes to the dark face, framed in with the curling iron-gray hair and beard, and met the dark, suffering eyes bent sorrowfully on hers, and compassion filled her heart.

"Good-morning, Lackland," said Sallust. Then, turning to his companion, he added,—"Mrs. Fitzgerald, permit me to present to you my friend, Mr. Lackland, of—of—of—" Sallust looked at his friend for help.

"'Lackland, of Nowhere,'" said the latter, with a smile. "Is not that a consistent name and title for a homeless wanderer, Mrs. Fitzgerald? And to foreign ears, who could not understand our language, would not 'Lackland, of Nowhere,' sound as grandly as 'Rowley, of Cave Court?' or as 'Fitzgerald, of the Summit?'" Then, in a deeper tone, he added—"I have been honoured with the friendship of Colonel Fitzgerald; I feel more honoured in the acquaintance of his wife."

"I thank you, sir," said Gertrude. "I have heard my husband speak of you with esteem and affection."

"*That voice too!*" murmured Lackland to himself. But Sallust trod on his foot to remind him that he was no longer in the 'silent solitudes' of the Western plains, and there was now no necessity for his talking to himself in order to keep from growing deaf and dumb by desuetude, and so recalled him to himself before Gertrude had perceived that he was soliloquizing.

"I was with Colonel Fitzgerald a long time at Fort Invincible," said Lackland—"yes, I was with him more than twelve months."

"And you rendered him great and valuable services in his border warfare," said the little lady.

"Oh, nothing of the sort. Fifteen years of a semi-savage life on the border had made me useful as a scout. That is all," answered Lackland.

"I am sure Colonel Fitzgerald spoke of your services as of the utmost value to him," said Gertrude.

She heard the breakfast gong with a sense of relief, though she had to take the stranger's arm, as he offered it to lead her to the table. After breakfast her escorts invited her to go on shore to see Queenstown. But Gertrude declined the offer with thanks, and so the two gentlemen went on shore for a few hours.

In a few hours, Lackland and Sallust came to their ship, bringing wild flowers. They poured these treasures into the lap of Gertrude, who thanked the givers, and took the gifts, and made her stateroom gay with them. The *Zanzibar* sailed at dusk. The wind arose in the night and blew a gale; the sea roughened, and the ship rolled heavily, and the passengers sickened again. But this was the first of March, and March was coming in like a lion.

About sunrise, the wind rested for twelve hours. Few of the passengers appeared on deck. The second night of sea-sickness had prostrated them. Gertrude, who had suffered no relapse into illness, came up after breakfast, and passed the day in the open-air. On the setting of the sun the wind rose again, and grew higher until midnight; then it blew a hurricane until daylight, when it lulled.

All predicted fine weather for the remainder of the voyage, and they enjoyed it for the next three days. But on the seventh day out all this was changed. As they neared the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, the wind rose in the north-east. The weather grew cold.

Nearly all the men, and all the women except Gertrude, sought warmth in the cabins, where, rolled up in their wraps, they huddled around the stoves.

But Gertrude, accustomed to the bleak air of the higher Alleghanies, was not inconvenienced by the March weather. With her white "cloud" over her head, and her sea-shawl around her shoulders, she came on deck that bitter cold morning after breakfast, and took a seat

behind the wheel-house, where she was sheltered from the wind.

Here she sat, with her crochet work, and knitted, while she thought that in three more days, she should land in New York, and then, in two more, meet her husband. And then, perhaps for the hundredth time, she lived over, in imagination, the rapture of such a meeting. In these visions, Gertrude was in heaven.

She scarcely noticed the darkening of the sky, as the heavy clouds overcast the scene. Soon, the white darkness overspread the heavens, from horizon to horizon—a white darkness, in contrast to which the ocean looked a vast sea of ink. Then fine snow began to fall.

Gertrude did not feel the wind or the snow, but watched the fine, white dust sifted down on the bosom of the sea, and lost, or on the rigging, where it gathered in drifts on the weather side of every rope and timber, freezing as it fell, Gertrude's hands were growing too cold to knit, so she laid her work away in her little basket, and put on her warm gloves, and watched the increasing storm with interest.

Lackland and Sallust were at the opposite end of the ship, watching the weather.

Gertrude kept her post until the dinner-gong sounded. And by that time the deck and the rigging were laden with snow. Mr. Lackland and Sallust Rowley both came, and ranged themselves, one on each side of Gertrude, the elder man saying:

"I think, my dear lady, you must permit us to assist you. The snow freezes, and the deck is as glass, which, with the rolling of the ship, makes it difficult for us to keep our feet, and impossible for you to do so."

He was polite in speaking to women, this strange man. Gertrude gave a hand to each, with thanks and smiles, and allowed them to lift her to her feet.

And the moment she stepped off the sheltered spot where she had sat, and attempted to walk the slippery and rolling deck, she found how impossible it was for her to do without assistance on both hands, and how necessary was the united support of her two body-guards.

When she reached the dinner-tables, she found that the storm-stands had been put on, so that every piece of china and glass sat in a separate pen. Now the ship

rolled so fearfully that the attempt to eat dinner was a feat of legerdemain. When it was over, Gertrude made an attempt to return to the deck, but found the feat impracticable. The ship was rolling with unusual violence, and the companion-way was like a staircase of glass, dangerous to climb, if stationary, but fatal in the present tossing of the ship. The wind was higher, the sea rougher, and the snow thicker than ever. It was growing dark. The deck seemed to be deserted by all except the men and officers working the ship.

Gertrude retreated to the cabin, where she retired to her stateroom, and went to bed.

"Two days more, and then New York; five more, and then Gerald!" she murmured, as she closed her eyes.

She was startled by a voice near the door.

"A pot of strong coffee for the captain! He don't leave the deck to-night," said the voice.

The words did not alarm her with any suspicion of danger. She only thought that the captain must be a very faithful officer, and she pitied him for having to pass an "arctic" night on that deck.

Musing on the rapture of her approaching meeting with her husband, Gertrude closed her eyes.

Rocked by the rolling of the ship, Gertrude fell asleep, slept as soundly as a child.

She slept soundly until morning, when she was roused by a tremendous shock that nearly threw her out of the berth.

Before she could collect herself, or think what could have happened, she felt the ship shudder like a human being struck with ague, and then stop still, as a sound of water filled the ear.

Gertrude sat up in her berth and listened.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by that sound of gurgling waters.

Then there was the rushing of many feet, and the mingling of many voices, but they seemed at a distance.

"What has happened?" cried a voice within hearing.

"Why, the ship has struck an iceberg and stove in her bows. She'll sink in five minutes!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ICE SHIP.

"WE are lost!" yelled one frantic voice.

"The ship has struck an iceberg and stove in her port quarter!" cried another.

"She is filling fast; she will go to the bottom in five minutes!" roared a chorus.

All this passed within hearing of our panic-stricken heroine, who sat listening and aghast.

Then all voices were drowned in a confusion of noises, of people rushing about the decks, shrieking, groaning, exclaiming! for a great number of passengers had been roused by being thrown from their berths by the violence of the shock when the ship struck, and had rushed out in terror to discover the cause of the concussion.

The ship was wrecked on an island of ice, and every hope of saving her or of keeping her desperate condition concealed from the knowledge of the passengers was out of the question.

The captain and the officers of the steamer had to calm the excitement of the crowd, and to provide the means of escape from death by drowning.

Soon the tumult subsided, and above the hum of voices arose the tones of Captain Knight issuing his commands to his officers and crew in a calm and self-possessed manner.

Some men were sent to cover the hole through which the sea was coming in with sail-cloth, to lessen the rapid flow of the water.

Other men were ordered to throw the cargo overboard. Others were sent to the pumps, to pump water from the hold.

And a picked party were charged with the duty of getting out the life-boats.

There are supreme crises in life which arouse in some

souls all the faith and self-sacrificing heroism of which our nature is capable, thus rendering them victorious over all suffering, despair, and even death.

Such was the effect of this disaster on Gertrude.

Rallying from the first shock, calmed by the presence of death, she put on her clothes to go on deck.

Her soul was inspired with thoughts of life, not of death —of meeting, not of parting.

"In another hour," she murmurs to herself, "I may be born into the purer life. In another hour I may be beside my dear husband—beside him sooner than I hope to be, nearer to him than I ever was before, nearer to him than I ever could be in this state of existence. And I need never leave him more; but I may stay with him, an invisible guard to banish all evil, to bring all good. Awful, beautiful thought!"

She opened the door of her stateroom, passed through the cabin, and up the companion ladder to look out. The weather was bitterly cold from the surrounding ice; but the snow-storm had subsided, and the sky was clear, and the sea calm, and the Eastern horizon, sky and sea, flushed with the rising of the sun. Nothing seemed to indicate the least danger. The ship was fast on an island of ice; but she stood as still as a house on land.

The sea lapped around her stern, while above her bows towered a precipice of ice, many hundred feet higher than her mainmast head, and projecting forward, a broad shelf of ice, capped with snow and fringed with icicles. The ship seemed a vessel of ice laden with snow, for not only was her deck deep in snow and glazed with ice, but every mast was sheathed in ice and every cross-beam capped with snow. The sun now sparkling above the eastern horizon transformed this scene into one of beauty, splendour, and sublimity. His beams touched the ship and the precipice of ice, lighting them up with radiance as of millions of rainbows around a ship and island of blazing diamonds, set in a sea of opals, under a sky of sapphire, in the glory of the morning. Never came the Angel of Death in such magnificent array. Standing at the head of the companion ladder, Gertrude looked for a moment, and passed on and entered on the frenzied uproar of the groaning deck, where the multitude of women, girls and children were weeping and

shrieking in all the terror and despair inspired by their desperate condition—her own the only patient soul and quiet soul among them.

Gertrude had scarcely time to take in all the horror of this scene, when, from the surging crowd shot Sallust Rowley, coming into collision with her, and exclaiming:

"Why, Gertrude! I beg your pardon! I was hurrying in search of you. You know what has happened?"

"Yes, I can see what has happened! The ship is wrecked on the ice!" she calmly replied.

"And are you not frightened?"

"No."

"Well, you're a brick! But I call it blamed mean of fortune to wreck us twice in one month—first by fire, and then by ice. But come, they are putting the women into the first life-boat. Come!" he cried, seizing her hand, drawing it through his arm, and pushing his way through the crowd.

"Are there life-boats enough to save all?" asked Gertrude.

"Not to save a tenth part of them," said Sallust.

"Can nothing be done for all these people here?" she pleaded, looking on the crowd with pity.

"Everything possible is being done for them. Every able-bodied man—captain, officers, crew, and passengers—are hard at work for their deliverance. Don't hold back, Gertrude. Push as well as I do, or we shall never get through this crowd in time."

"What are the men doing to save all these?" she persisted.

"Some are covering the hole with sail-cloths, to keep out as much water as possible. Others are throwing the cargo overboard to lighten her; others are bailing her out with buckets; others at work at the pumps; all with the purpose of keeping her from sinking until they have time to launch the life-boats and construct a raft. Some of the officers and men are engaged getting out the life-boats. But, push as well as I, or we will never get through this press to secure the boat," urged Sallust, as he dragged his companion to the starboard main port.

But at that moment a prolonged huzza went up from the sailors.

"Oh, what is that for?" inquired Gertrude.

"That's for the first boat that is safely launched and gone. I knew we'd be too late for the first; and we'll have to wait for the second boat, and every one lessens our chance of deliverance; for if the steerage passengers should mutiny, they will seize the life-boats."

"Oh, Sallust! in a scene like this! Hush! do not judge them prematurely! Love of life is so natural! They have the same right as others to try to save themselves and their wives and children," said Gertrude.

"Yes, but they can't save themselves in that way. Where there is mutiny and violence, instead of order, they are sure to swamp the boats, and drown themselves, which would serve them right, and not be of the least consequence, if they had not deprived us of the means of safety."

"Sallust, do not let us think so much of ourselves when there are so many others to think of!" said Gertrude.

"There! they have got the second boat ready now. Come! we must catch her!" cried Mr. Rowley, pulling his companion through the crowd, which was now thinned, to the larboard main port, where the second boat hung suspended over the side of the ship, above a roseate sea as smooth as a mirror, so that any one could perceive that there was not the slightest difficulty or danger in lowering it to the surface of the water, whatever fate or fortune should attend it.

The boat was manned by the second mate, with six sailors, and well filled with women, children, and some few men, but room was made for Gertrude, who was handed into a seat in the stern, and for Sallust, when it was known that he was her companion and escort.

"Oh, where is Mr. Lackland, Sallust?" inquired Gertrude, as the young man took his place near her.

"He went off in the first boat. I saw him enter it, to help to work it. He is a skilful marine officer, among his other accomplishments," answered Sallust.

"I am glad he is provided for. But I hope, I pray that the ship may float until they can make a raft, and get everybody off her," said Gertrude.

At that moment the boat was launched, and as it put off from the side of the wreck a cheer arose from the men left on deck.

"Ah! brave souls!" thought Gertrude to herself—"it is too sad to hear them cheer us, when we are leaving them on the wreck, perhaps to perish!"

And she covered her face with her hands, for she could not look on those men who stood on the deck, waving their hands to the retreating boat. The weather was intensely cold. The passengers had wrapped themselves in their winter garments, yet they shuddered in the biting air. They were beginning to get hungry.

"There is a cask of fresh water and a bottle of spirits and bread and canned beef on board," said one of the sailors.

"Where are you going to take us, Mr. Raymond?" asked Sallust of the officer commanding the boat.

"We shall steer for the coast of Newfoundland, which is two hundred miles distant, but we shall probably fall in with some ship and be picked up long before reaching land," answered the mate.

Gertrude heard this conversation while her head was bowed on her knees and her face covered with her hands.

She looked around her.

The life-boat Number 2, with her forty passengers, was making good way over the water, but the ship of ice on the island of ice was still in sight astern of them. Boat Number 1 was far ahead of them, and almost out of sight.

"The first boat is running away from us. I think it would be so much better for the boats to keep together," said one of the women.

"Better for us, maybe, but not for her. She is the best boat with the best chance of reaching land in safety, if she should not be picked up. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and she obeys that law by running away from us!" answered one of the men at the oars.

"Hallo! what's that?" exclaimed Sallust Rowley, as another cheer reached their ears.

"It is from the wreck! they have launched the third boat!" answered another passenger.

Gertrude shuddered with sympathy. She felt it to be too heart-rending to hear the poor men left, perhaps to perish on the wreck, cheering on those who were leaving her, and seeking safety in the life-boats.

"If the weather should continue like this for a few days we shall have nothing to fear; we have only to protect ourselves against the cold until we reach land, or get picked up," said Sallust Rowley.

Another hurrah sounded from the ship.

"Hurrah! they have launched Number 4! That is the last life-boat, now they have nothing to do but to build their raft!" exclaimed the man with the spy-glass.

Gertrude covered her face again, and prayed for the brave men left behind that they might have time to build their raft before the sinking of the ship. They had run a long way from the wreck, which could be seen by the naked eye, only as a cluster of ice. The two last boats, at some distance from each other, could be descried advancing towards them.

"Will they overtake us, do you think?" inquired one of the passengers of the officer in command.

"Yes, and outstrip us; for they are faster boats than this."

"Is not this a good boat then?"

"A very good and reliable boat, but slow," said Mr. Raymond.

This prediction was verified within the next hour. Boats Numbers 3 and 4 overtook them, cheered, and passed them, and in another hour were out of sight.

Life-boat Number 2 was alone upon the sea. The first distribution of rations took place, and a biscuit, a morsel of beef and a can of water was served to each individual.

At noon Mr. Raymond made a reckoning, and declared that they were within two hundred miles of the Island Cove, on the coast of Newfoundland. At night there was a second distribution of rations, in the same proportion as at the first, and of the same materials, with the addition of a little spirits added to the water, in the mistaken notion that it would help to keep out the cold of the night, to be spent in the open boat at sea. A brilliant starlight night followed. The air was calm, and the sea was quiet. The boat steered N. N. W., glided over the waters.

"If this weather lasts, we are sure to reach land all right, if we are not picked up by some vessel sailing over this course," said one of the men at the oars.

"If we can live through these freezing nights! But my feet, in the bottom of this boat, are like rocks now! They will be hard frozen by morning," moaned an old lady.

"Lift them up and put them in my lap. I will wrap them in my cloak and warm them," said Gertrude.

"They would give you your death of cold. You might as well take two bricks of ice in your lap," said the old lady. But she accepted her neighbour's offer, and let her restore the torpid feet to life.

There were several children in the boat, who had seemed to enjoy the trip. They were most warmly clothed and the best protected against the cold, and soon after it had grown dark, they had fallen asleep with their heads on their mother's knees, well covered from sea-air by their mother's warm shawls or cloaks.

But no one except the children slept that night.

The position was too suggestive of danger, if not too dangerous, to permit them to sleep on this first night in the open boat at sea.

At midnight the sailors were relieved at the oars, several passengers taking their places. But even these fatigued men did not sleep.

The night seemed long: but with the exception of the intense cold it was not so bad. The sea calm and smooth, and the boat glided swiftly over its surface.

Never had a life-boat a more prosperous voyage. Her passengers were saved from the horrors that usually attend such a situation.

On the second morning a breeze sprang up from the north-west. The sun rose clear on a rippling sea, and displayed to the voyagers a large ship bearing down upon them.

Their souls were thrilled with gratitude. Expressions of delight and thanksgiving burst from them. And then a unanimous huzza arose from the men.

But it was necessary to attract the attention of the ship, in case she had not made them out.

A woman's red shawl was fastened to the end of an oar, which was taken by two men, who held it high above their heads, as the ship bore down on them, until a salvo shot from the stranger told them they were observed.

Then the men lowered their signal of distress, and took the oars and rowed to the ship.

"Let us thank Heaven for this speedy deliverance!" said Gertrude, in a low voice.

"Yes, dear, and I thank you that my old feet are not frozen so hard as to require amputation. But I am afraid you will suffer for your kindness, and get an inflammation of the lungs, with having had such dabs of ice against your bosom," replied the old lady.

"Gertrude, dear cousin, how are you getting on, any way?" inquired Sallust, looking over her shoulder.

"Very well, thanks! And you?" she asked.

"Oh, capitally! We shall get on board that ship in good time for breakfast! Think of a good hot cup of coffee, after such a day and night as we have passed!" he cried.

"Sallust, we have had a blessed day and night, and we have every reason to be grateful! We have been cold in the open boat, but not enough to hurt us. What a quick deliverance!"

"Just cold, and hungry, and tired enough to give us a keen sense of enjoyment in a warm cabin, a good breakfast-table and comfortable berths," said Sallust.

CHAPTER IV.

"GOD BLESS CAPTAIN WAILES AND THE BECKY."

THE boat was rapidly approaching the ship, which was waiting for her.

"What is she?" inquired Sallust Rowley.

"Don't know! But she carries the Stars and Stripes," answered the man with the telescope.

"An American ship!" said a chorus of voices.

"A merchantman," added Sallust Rowley.

Gertrude hoped she might be homeward bound.

They drew nearer the ship. They could see the men standing on her deck.

In five minutes they were under her bows.

The oarsmen pulled alongside the gangway where they secured the boat, while the chilled women were helped to climb on the deck.

This awkward process was made doubly difficult by the condition of the party, whose limbs were benumbed with cold and cramped by long sitting.

The captain, who, with his officers and men, stood on deck to receive the women as they were handed up, welcomed them heartily, condoled with them on their late calamity, but congratulated them on their lucky escape, and offered them the use of his after-cabin, with every aid in his power to bestow.

Gertrude, in behalf of herself and her companions, thanked the sailor and accepted his offers.

The captain sent for the stewardess, a good-natured looking mulatto of fifty, who came forward to take the women below and provide for their comfort. She took them to the cabin, which was warmed by a stove, around which all the women gathered to warm their benumbed limbs.

"It is a mercy that your clothes are all dry, ladies," said the stewardess. "You couldn't have been exposed to that snow-storm day before yesterday. How long might you have been out in the boat?"

"Twenty-four hours. We left the wreck about this hour yesterday morning," answered Gertrude.

"Dear me! And how did it all happen, honey?" inquired the woman.

"Our ship, the *Zanzibar*, from Southampton to New York, struck an iceberg."

"So many ships be wrecked that way! I 'most swear every time I get to port I never will trust myself on ship-board again. But I have been so long with Captain Wailes and the *Becky*, that I suppose I shall end my days here."

"Captain Wailes and the *Becky?*" echoed Gertrude.

"Yes, honey—Captain Wailes and the *Becky*. The *Becky* of Baltimore, though him, and me, and the two mates, and a good part of the crew be from Charlotte Hall, St. Mary's County, Maryland. And most of us have sailed along of Captain Wailes for twenty year. Me and my husband—he's the ship's cook—have sailed with him for twenty-two years. Just you think of sailing in the same ship with the same mates, and pretty much the same crew for so many years! Don't you think it miraculous?"

"I know little about sea-life; but in land-life I know it is common to live in the same house, with the same family and the same servants, for many years at a time," said Gertrude.

"Lor' bless you, my dear, it is different with a ship that changes its crew with every voyage. But the *Becky* is a notable exception to all rules. It is wonderful any ship should a kept afloat so many years without accident, and that the ship's company should a kept together all this time is more so; and altogether it is miraculous."

"How do you account for it?" inquired Gertrude.

"It is because we all love Captain Wailes so well we won't leave him. Why, there is the first mate, Mr. Burroughs, and the second mate, Mr. Estep—they have both been offered the command of merchant ships time and

again—there was temptation!—and they refused them! There was fyedility! Why, what do you think the officers and crew of the *Becky* did once?"

"What did they do?"

"It was two years ago last winter, and the *Becky* was at Canton. When Christmas come around, I'm blessed if them fellows didn't combine to present Captain Wailes with the beautifullest set of chiny you ever beheld! There were three hundred and thirty-three pieces in all! And every single piece, every cup and saucer, dish and plate and bowl and basin, had burned into it, in red letters—

'God Bless Captain Wailes and the Becky.'

What do you think of that?" inquired the stewardess.

"They must have loved and honoured their captain very much," said Gertrude, smiling.

"Three hundred and thirty-three blessings, burnt in red letters on the finest chiny!" added the stewardess.

Then, seeing that the women around the fire were growing restless, she said:

"And now, my dear ladies, if you would like to go to your staterooms, to take a good wash off, I'll wait on you."

The women arose to follow her.

The cabin was a comfortable one. It was provided with twelve staterooms. Each stateroom was furnished with two berths, a wash-stand and chair. There were eleven ladies and nine children to be accommodated. When these were all quartered in their places the good-natured stewardess said to Gertrude:

"Now, my dear, *you* are to have a stateroom to yourself, as you seem to be the only lady as hasn't got some un hanging on to her."

"But if any of the other ladies are crowded I can easily take some one in with me," answered Gertrude.

"They ain't crowded; besides which, none of 'em wants their party to be separated; not after sich an adventer as they had yesterday on the ice. You must tell me all about it, soon as we get settled," said the woman.

"I will, with pleasure, for how thankful I am that we

fell in with your ship!" replied Gertrude, as she entered the stateroom pointed out to her.

The first thing Gertrude did was to kneel beside her berth and return thanks to Heaven for their deliverance.

Then she arose to take a good wash.

She felt contented with her situation. She heard the good stewardess say that the *Becky* was from Baltimore. She knew that when the life-boat fell in with the ship, the latter was seen off to the northeast, and was steering in a southwesterly direction—the direction she would have taken to Baltimore, and she judged that the *Becky* was homeward bound, and rejoiced in the thought that her meeting with her husband could not long be delayed.

How she was mistaken remains to be seen.

While the women were made comfortable by the stewardess, the men received the ministrations of the captain and his mates.

By the time the women had refreshed themselves with a bath and hair-dressing, and returned to the cabin, a man put his head in at the top of the companion stairs and notified them that breakfast was ready in the main cabin.

The women, longing for their comforting cups of tea or coffee, went up.

At the head of the companion ladder, they were met by the captain of the ship and some of the men of their party.

"Give me your hand, my dear, to steady you," said the captain, speaking to Gertrude.

"I thank you, sir," she replied, as she accepted his aid.

"Now tell me your name, that I may know what to call you," he said, as he drew her hand within his arm and with tenderness supported her steps to the after-cabin.

"My name is Fitzgerald," said Gertrude.

"Miss Fitzgerald, let me welcome you again on board my ship."

"Thanks, sir, but—but—" began Gertrude, "I am *Mrs.* Fitzgerald—Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald."

The captain stopped and looked at her in amazement for a moment, and then said, with comic gravity:

"I *beg* your pardon. Now let me introduce myself,

My name is George Wailes, master of the *Becky;* and we are both at your service."

"Thanks. Yes. I know. '*God bless Captain Wailes and the Becky!*'" said the little lady.

The captain burst into so loud a laugh that he attracted the attention of all his companions.

"*That* was some of Kitty Barber's, my stewardess's gossip," said the captain.

The captain took the head of the table, and the first mate the foot. On each side sat the men and women rescued from the life-boat, and half a dozen other men.

"Yes," said the captain. "We used to have many passengers, ladies and gentlemen, until the steamships broke up our trade. Now we only have a few merchants, or missionaries, and never any ladies, except by such a chance as this."

The breakfast, of Mocha coffee, black and green tea, rolls, flavoured ham, broiled chickens, and Dundee marmalade, was delicious, and was enjoyed by the hungry refugees from the life-boat.

"How soon do you expect to get into port, Captain Wailes?" inquired Gertrude. "Do you think you will be in within ten days?"

"'Within ten days!' Why, my dear madam, where do you think we are bound?" exclaimed the captain.

"Homeward, to Baltimore," answered Gertrude.

"We are bound to San Francisco, by Cape Horn."

CHAPTER V.

"BOUND ON A VOYAGE OF AWFUL LENGTH."

"'BOUND to San Francisco, by the way of Cape Horn!'" echoed Gertrude, in a fainting voice.

Captain Wailes saw the error he had committed, and hastened to rectify it.

"But we need not take *you* so far from your home, my dear—I mean, madam," he said.

"Thanks. It is a long voyage—a voyage of many months, is it not?" she inquired.

"Yes, my child—I mean my dear madam; but you are so infantile. Yes, it is a long voyage; but we need not take *you* so far, if you do not wish to go."

"Oh! I leave all my friends behind me!—all I have in the world!" said Gertrude; but she meant Gerald Fitzgerald, and no one else, for he was the world to her.

"Well, we must try to send you back to them, by the first homeward-bound ship," said the captain.

"You *do* meet homeward-bound ships?" cried Gertrude.

"We do! lots of them! droves of them!" cried the captain.

"I am so glad! And we may meet one to-day?"

"We may, or," added the captain—"we may not meet one for two or three days. So do not keep your attention on the *qui vive* of expectancy, but compose yourself, and eat your breakfast. You are eating nothing, my dear madam! Forgive me, but I have a girl at home, in old St. Mary's, who is about your age, and I shall not think her marriageable for half a dozen years to come."

When Gertrude parted from the captain, she entered the cabin, where she found a curious scene going on.

On the table lay pieces of cotton, linen, and woollen goods, piles of Scotch plaid shawls, lamb's-wool hose and under-vests, and cases of needles, thimbles, scissors, and spool-cotton.

Around the table were gathered all the women in the cabin, selecting from the goods.

"What is all this about?" inquired Gertrude of the good stewardess, who seemed to be the saleswoman.

"While you ladies were at breakfast these goods were brought from the hold by the captain's orders. They are out of the captain's share of the cargo, which is composed of Manchester, Sheffield, and Scotch goods," explained the stewardess.

"But what are they brought here for? We have no money to buy anything. Our money has all gone to the bottom in the *Zanzibar*," said Gertrude.

"The captain don't want anybody to buy anything. All this is a free offering to the shipwrecked ladies! 'God bless Captain Wailes and the *Becky!*' Captain Wailes knew you would want more than one change of clothes and the *Becky* had her hold full of these necessary goods. So the captain has had all this stuff got up for you, and the scissors to cut 'em out, and the thimbles, needles and thread to make 'em up! It will be amusement for you, ladies, on the long voyage," said the stewardess.

All on boat No. 2, with Gertrude, were in parties, and had been so received on the *Becky*, although the limited accommodations of the ship necessitated the arrangement by which all the women and children were bestowed in the after-cabin, and all their husbands, fathers, and other male relatives in the main cabin. But Gertrude had no one with her except her deliverer and escort, Sallust Rowley. And a sense of propriety warned her she must not make a companion of him; but she must avoid him as much as she could do without discourtesy.

She felt that the kind-hearted sailor, Captain Wailes, was likely to be her best friend; but she knew she should see little of him either, on account of his duties, for he was an active commander, and did not leave the conduct of his ship to his subordinate officers.

As for her fellow-voyagers in the ladies' cabin, they were absorbed in their parties with their own troubles,

and gave little attention to any one or any thing outside of their circle of grievances. And the stewardess had too many ladies and children on her hands to give much sympathy to any one individual. So Gertrude was much alone in that crowded cabin. But she did not cultivate her solitude and nurse it as a grievance. Her heart going forth in kind thoughts and kind acts towards all around her, soon created a sphere of love which embraced first the children, then their mothers, and even the selfish within her influence.

She exerted herself to be agreeable to her companions. When she had finished but one change of clothing for her own use, she made up one for the old lady, whose sight was too impaired to enable her to sew for herself. When she had completed this task, she helped the mothers who had children, suffering for clean clothes. By the third day of wearing the childrens' raiment was so much soiled as to bring this exclamation from the stewardess:

"Well, I think it's a special Providence that our cargo is all in dry goods, else I don't know what would have become of these children!"

But Gertrude helped the mothers so effectually that the children were soon clad in new clothes. Gertrude made a shirt for Sallust, and sent it to him.

She thought that one change of clothing could be made to do, for she hoped from day to day, to meet that homeward-bound ship which was to carry them "to old Virginia's shore." But when a week had passed away, her heart so utterly sickened she felt she could be silent no longer. She went on deck on the seventh day to the captain.

"*Oh*, Captain Wailes," she said, "tell me truly—*is* there any hope of our meeting a homeward bound ship?"

The captain looked compassionately on her careworn face and brown eyes, and answered, kindly:

"My dear child, I *do* tell you truly—yes, there is good hope of meeting a homeward-bound ship, or some ship by which you might reach home. If we were to meet a steamer or a sailing vessel bound to London or Havre, we could put you on her, and you could go to London or Havre, or to any other port in Europe to which she might be bound, and from thence take ship to the United States, and reach your home in four weeks."

"Oh, how long!" cried Gertrude.

"My child, are you so eager to get home that you cannot endure the unavoidable delay?"

"Captain Wailes, I ought to be patient, but I cannot! Oh, if you *only* knew! My case is the worst case on board, Captain Wailes!" she moaned.

"My little daughter," said the old sailor, "every one on the ship thinks his own or her own case the hardest to bear. That is very natural."

"Oh, Captain Wailes! You don't know!"

"Tell me, daughter! What is it makes your case so much worse than that of all the others?" he inquired.

"Oh, sir! he believed me to be dead—he was *convinced* I was dead before the *Zanzibar* ever sailed."

"EH!"

"He did. And he had the best reason for believing so. Have you not heard of the burning of the *Messenger* in Dover Straits?"

"I have. I have read it in the papers; I have read every man's statement—the captain's statement, and the first engineer's statement, and the steward's statement, and Lord Theobald Nugent's, a passenger's statement. I read all about the shipwrecks and disasters at sea, because I can learn practical truths from them. But what has the burning of the *Messenger* to do with *you?*"

"Listen, and I will tell you, Captain Wailes."

And she told him the story of the burning of the *Messenger* in Dover's Straits, and of the swamping of the woman's life-boat, and of her rescue by Sallust Rowley. She did not tell him she had been picked up first by her husband, and abandoned by him, for she said to herself, "The captain will misunderstand it, and blame Gerald."

"I give in. Your case is the hardest case of all the shipwrecked party. But you have faith and courage. Hope for the coming of that homeward-bound ship!" said Captain Wailes.

"But if it should not come?"

"At the worst, you would have to sail with me 'round Cape Horn and up the Pacific coast, and back the same way. It would take a year; but you have no idea how soon a year really passes! Meanwhile, Colonel Fitzgerald is not suffering the anguish of suspense about you.

And believe me, daughter, there is no other grief in this world so hard to bear as such a suspense would be; for there is no rest in it; it is a torture-rack that holds the spirit in agony. He is not subjected to that. He believes that you are in heaven, and his soul rests in that belief, however mournfully, but it rests."

Gertrude bowed her head, but made no reply.

"And one last word now."

"Yes, Captain."

"Remember there is always a chance of meeting a homeward-bound ship. Let that hope cheer you."

"I will try to govern my own spirit, Captain Wailes," she replied, as she left the deck.

As week after week passed without a sign of a homeward-bound ship, her heart grew sick with "hope deferred." She grew paler and weaker. But we must leave her on her voyage, and return to Gerald and Geraldine.

CHAPTER VI.

"OLD COALS SOON KINDLE."

WE left Dr. Goodwin and Miss Fitzgerald seated on the deck of the *Europa*, in the Cove of Cork, where the steamer lay, waiting for the Irish mail—with the letters and passengers from London—the same mail that Gertrude had missed by five minutes.

It was late in the afternoon, they had had luncheon, and returned to the deck to gaze on the same beautiful scene by sunset which they had first beheld by sunrise.

Gerald, who had gone on shore in the morning, had not yet come back.

The Irish mail arrived at six o'clock. With this mail and the last passengers Gerald returned to the ship. He did not approach Geraldine, but went to his stateroom. Half an hour afterward the ship sailed.

Dr. Goodwin and Miss Fitzgerald remained on the deck, conversing and gazing on the "Green Isle," in the

glory of the setting sun, and the silver radiance of the rising moon; for these two luminaries were on the verge of the horizon at the same moment; but the sun was setting behind the western hills of Ireland, and the moon was rising from the channel, in the east.

The two friends sat there until the last light of the sun had faded, and the rays of the moon were streaming on the sea. Then Gerald Fitzgerald joined them, and stood leaning over the bulwarks.

Dr. Goodwin, on seeing him, arose and said:

"Now that the colonel has made his appearance to look after you, I will retire. I am susceptible of taking cold, and the night air is keen."

"Oh, pray, take care of yourself, Dr. Goodwin! I had no idea that you felt the chill, or I would not have permitted you to stay here so long," said Geraldine, quickly; and she thought that no experienced chaperone or manœuvering mamma could have acted with more tact and discretion than this same venerable old Doctor of Divinity.

But the truth is that Dr. Goodwin *was* afraid of the night air, and he had no other reason for leaving the deck. He bowed and withdrew.

"Gerald, here is a seat. Do sit down," said Geraldine, as soon as the old man was out of sight.

Colonel Fitzgerald bowed, and took the place.

"Gerald, what are you thinking about?" she inquired, with solicitude.

"I *beg* your pardon?" said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"You are always dreaming, Gerald. What are you dreaming of?" she inquired.

"Geraldine, there is always a scene before my mind's eye that I cannot banish. No, nor, however agonizing it may be to me, that I *would* banish if I could. It is the scene of my wife's death beneath the waves of that red sea lighted up by the flames of the burning ship," he sadly replied.

"Gerald, this is morbid. Think how many men—fifty, have lost wives, children, sisters, or mothers, by that awful disaster. Suppose all of them should brood over their troubles as you do over yours?"

"Geraldine, fifty men, nor five men ever left their wives or children to perish as I left mine," he cried.

"Oh, Gerald! Gerald! my betrothed no longer, but my dearest friend still! You wrong yourself—you wrong yourself cruelly! You did not leave her to perish! She was killed by an accident before my eyes. I saw her killed before I called to you for help. It is an awful thing to tell you, and it was a more horrible thing to see, but I saw the back of her head crushed like an egg-shell by a blow from that plank you struck out of my hand! I saw she was dead before I called for assistance. I had a right to your assistance, Gerald, for you had inadvertently stricken my support from under me, and I was drowning by your act."

"If I could believe that it might mitigate my remorse, though it could not soothe my sorrow," he answered.

"Do you then presume to doubt my word?"

"Certainly I do not doubt your veracity; but I may doubt the evidence of your senses, as I should doubt that of my own," answered Colonel Fitzgerald.

"You are morbid, Gerald. Oh, that I could bring you to a healthier frame of mind!"

"Geraldine, do not trouble yourself with me. I am not worth your care," he answered, moodily.

"Gerald, I know all is over between us—that we can never be more than friends; but, we are too near kin, too dear friends, to make it possible for me to look on your suffering and not suffer with you—to feel so helpless to help you and not—"

Here, proud Geraldine burst into tears—she dropped her head upon his shoulder and wept.

"Let me lead you to your stateroom, Geraldine; you would be better there," said Colonel Fitzgerald, rising, and depriving her of support on his shoulder.

"Thanks, no, sir, I do not need assistance. I need self-recollection more, for I have forgotten myself, I think," she answered, as she walked off.

Colonel Fitzgerald followed her to the head of the companion-ladder, and saw her into the ladies' cabin in safety, and then he returned to his seat.

"Poor girl! I shall be glad, for her sake, when this voyage is over," he said to himself; for it seemed that the death of Gertrude had extinguished the last spark of affection he had left for Geraldine; and that he loved Gertrude in her ocean grave more than he had ever loved

Geraldine in all the pride of her life and beauty. Was he mistaken in himself? Time will show.

As he sat ruminating, a drowsiness stole over him. He roused himself several times, but always relapsed into slumber, until he fell asleep. Then he had a dream.

He thought that he was sitting on the after deck of the *Europa*, gazing out on the sea, when glided to his side the form of Gertrude, his drowned wife.

"Gerald," she murmured, "I have been standing by your side so long. Gerald, neither life nor death can separate those who truly love each other. I have come to you in this way, to pray you to save yourself and me! to let no false pity, nor any other motive tempt you to raise a barrier between us. I am praying you to wait for me, Gerald! I am hastening to you in the—"

The vision vanished, and the voice sank into silence before the sentence was completed, and Gerald Fitzgerald woke to find he had been dreaming.

Yet the dream impressed him as deeply, and remained with him as long, as if it had been a reality.

The sweet face had seemed so natural, the gentle voice so familiar.

"Oh, my lost angel! Shall I never see your meek eyes again?—never hear your dulcet tones? No, no! I never shall, neither in this world nor in the world to come! for a gulf as wide as separated Dives from Lazarus must divide me from your pure spirit," he groaned within himself, as he paced the deck.

He saw no more of Geraldine until he met her at the tea-table. She seemed to have recovered her equanimity.

Their voyage across the Atlantic passed without event, except the snowstorm that overtook them as they were entering New York harbour. This was the same snowstorm in which the captain of the *Zanzibar*, on the Grand Bank of Newfoundland, ran on the island of ice. But the *Europa*, being three days ahead of the *Zanzibar*, was safe in the harbour of New York when the storm broke.

The ship reached her pier about nine o'clock that night.

Colonel Fitzgerald, leaving Dr. Goodwin to look after Geraldine, hastened to the railway-station of the New York and Washington lines, to ascertain when the first train would leave for the South.

He was told that the last train for that night had started, and there would not be another till six o'clock next morning.

He went to the steamer with this news, and took his party to the old Astor House.

"Now, I shall have to hasten to Virginia with expedition. I must leave by the first morning train for Washington, which starts at six o'clock," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he seated himself at the supper-table with his party. "But I need not hurry you or Miss Fitzgerald. If you, or if Geraldine should prefer to stop in New York for a few days—"

"I thank you, Gerald," interrupted his cousin; "I prefer to go directly home."

"And so do I, Fitzgerald," added the doctor. "The same interest that takes you in such a hurry to Virginia, takes me also. I am as anxious to hear the communication of the dying woman Magdala, or—what is her barbarous name, Clea Phara, as you can be."

"Yes, but the woman declares she will not divulge the secret to any one but me," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"And this very properly, since she declares that this secret affects the honour of the Fitzgeralds! But if it should seriously relate to the rights of property, or the identity of the heiress, in that cause which you and I have had at heart, I think that the secret must be made public."

"Of course, Dr. Goodwin. The ends of justice must be served. Yet I have neither knowledge nor suspicion of what this woman's secret relates to! I often think it is nothing more than the hallucination of a diseased mind; or, I should think so, if I did not remember how the hearing of it hastened my father's death. I confess to some curiosity to meet this woman face to face, and hear what she has got to tell me."

"If the question is a fair one, may I ask what you are both talking about?" inquired Miss Fitzgerald.

"Yes, Geraldine, we are talking of that communication which the wandering maniac, whom we knew as Magdala, made to my father on his death-bed—"

"And which was said to have accelerated my uncle's death?"

"Yes, Magdala, or rather the gipsy Clea Phara, is on

her death-bed, and wishes to make a clean breast of it to me."

"This secret which she has boasted, if given to the public, would pull down the 'unsoiled plume' of Fitzgerald to the dust?" inquired Geraldine.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I defy her, or any one else, to divulge anything which can do that. And I am amazed, Gerald, that you should believe such a statement."

"Yet you and I know that there is one sealed page in our family history."

"You refer to Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, the son of your father's elder brother?"

"Yes, I refer to Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, my cousin."

"That romantic boy, who had his head turned by reading piratical romances, and who ought to have been flogged for his mad caper, instead of being so terribly punished as he was. But what has his fate to do with the case under discussion?"

"It may have nothing to do with it; it may have everything. Remember that nothing has been heard of the lad since his escape from the sloop-of-war *Samaria*, by jumping overboard at midnight."

"But he was supposed to have been drowned."

"Yes, *supposed*, but not ascertained to have been drowned. It seems to me trouble can only come to the family through some circumstance connected with him."

"Did you ever know him, Gerald?"

"No, he was fifteen years my senior. He was sent to sea at fourteen, and at seventeen entered into the conspiracy that ended in his ruin. It was a romantic boy's freak; but it ruined him and brought his parents to the grave. Yes, my father inherited Summit Manor through the tragedy in his elder brother's family. And if the secret that the gipsy woman told Maurice Fitzgerald on his deathbed had anything to do with the fate of Arthur Lloyd, it is no wonder in his weak state it hurried him into his grave, for he never could bear allusion to that unhappy youth."

"No; I know that my uncle could not endure to hear his name mentioned. His name—

> 'Was banished from each tongue and ear,
> Like words of wantonness and fear.'

But come! If we are to take the six o'clock morning train we must be up at half-past four. I will bid you good-night," said Geraldine, leaving the room.

As soon as she had locked herself in, all the composure of her manner vanished.

She threw herself on the bed and burst into tears, exclaiming:

"How hard he is to me! how hard to me whom he used to love so madly! But he loves the memory of that girl in the sea more than he ever loved me! Well, *she is* in the bottom of the sea, and can never come back to trouble me again. And as for Gerald, my betrothed, whom she took from me, I will win him yet! It may take time, but I will triumph!"

CHAPTER VII.

GERALD AND GERALDINE.

"I SHALL win him back to me—yes! My Gerald, who was mine, as I was his, from our childhood; years before he ever saw this girl whom he married and lost!—this girl, for whom he mourns with a persistency that must end in insanity or death, if it continues! Oh, the madness and blindness of that passion which parted us on that fatal night of our last bitter quarrel! But I will win him back again—I will! He has no lady relative to order his household, to sit at his table, to do the honours of the old Summit Manor House. So he must marry! Besides, he is the last Fitzgerald of the Summit; of a certainty he *will* marry. And who so fit to be his wife, the lady of the manor, as I am? In disposition, tastes, and pursuits we are sympathetic. In temper we are alike; for he is as proud, jealous, and exacting as people charge me with being. But no woman would suit him as I should suit him, and I must win him back. Yes, for his own sake! poor Gerald! for his own sake as much as for mine."

Such were the thoughts that kept Geraldine awake. She had fallen into a sleep of weariness, when she was awakened by the raps of the porter who had been charged with calling the travellers in time for the train.

Geraldine opened her eyes, collected her senses, and rang for her maid.

Meta answered the summons, and Miss Fitzgerald arose and commenced her travelling toilet.

When she was ready she passed into the sitting-room where their breakfast-table was laid, and Colonel Fitzgerald and Dr. Goodwin awaited her.

Dr. Goodwin, with courtesy, advanced with a bow, led her into the room, and placed her in the easiest chair.

Colonel Fitzgerald bade her good-morning, and rang for the breakfast to be brought in.

One of Geraldine's greatest trials was the politeness of Gerald's demeanour towards her.

"If he were coldly courteous to me, I should think he cherished some resentment against me for having discarded him once too often on that fatal night! But it would seem that he thanks me for that fatal night's work in setting him free from his engagement. I know when he took me at my word, left me, and married that low-born girl, his action was inspired by rage against me—not love for her! Yet he seems to have loved her afterwards! By what charm did that simple child win the heart of the handsome Fitzgerald? By what magic spell does she still hold him, bound to her in everlasting bonds that he does not wish to break? It would seem that he looks forward to riveting these bonds in another life, rather than to loosening them in this! To think that this humble bride, who gave herself away to him at his first word, should have become the adored wife, for whose death he mourns as never man mourned yet! It is most wonderful! I am sure he does not dream of marrying again. He does not think of it enough to resolve never to do it. But he must marry for all that, and he must marry me!"

While Geraldine's mind was absorbed by these thoughts, her face grew so haggard, that Dr. Goodwin, contemplating it, and knowing all her past relations with Gerald, read her thoughts, felt moved with compassion for her, and resolved to do all that in him lay to re-unite

her to her old lover, so that they might marry when the proper time should come.

The waiter brought in the breakfast, and announced that the carriages were at the door. Colonel Fitzgerald said:

"We have but fifteen minutes for breakfast, and must drive fast to reach our train in time."

Dr. Goodwin placed a chair for Geraldine and led her to the table.

Immediately after breakfast the travellers left the hotel for the railway station—the two gentlemen and the young lady going in one carriage, and the two servants with the luggage in the other.

They reached the station only in time to secure good seats—Miss Fitzgerald with her maid Meta, and Doctor Goodwin on the "Ladies' Car," and Colonel Fitzgerald, with Jubal, on another car.

This arrangement was so disappointing and provoking to Geraldine, that she could not forbear finding fault with it to Doctor Goodwin.

The train whirled on its course southward. They saw no more of Colonel Fitzgerald until they arrived at Washington. Then he met them on the platform, and put the question in a general way:

"Shall we go directly on to Virginia, by the night-coach, or shall we remain in Washington and rest until morning?"

"Oh, on to Virginia by the night-coach!" hurriedly answered Geraldine, who thought that in the stage-coach she would have Gerald's company for two days and nights.

After supper they took their places in the stage-coach, to start on their rough night journey to West Virginia.

But Geraldine was disappointed. She did not travel in companionship with Gerald. Colonel Fitzgerald mounted to the top of the coach with Jubal, and left the three inside places to the doctor, the lady, and her maid. Geraldine, wounded to the soul, made no comment to her companions, but thought bitterly:

"He keeps out of my way. It is humiliating. I know he avoids me because he dare not trust himself with me, lest his fidelity to that dead girl should be shaken. He married her in a moment of insanity to revenge himself

on me, whom he loved and worshipped, and with whom he was, for that moment, furiously angry. Everyone predicted that as soon as he came to his senses he would *despise* her for taking advantage of his insane offer, and *hate* her for being the obstacle to his reconciliation and marriage with me. But nothing of the sort happened. She, the humble country girl, so won the heart of this haughty man as to make him forget his first love—forget ME! Now, though a young and childless widower, and the last of an old line, he will not think of another marriage, will not look on another woman. Oh! what was the magic spell by which this Gertrude, *living*, won Fitzgerald, and *dead*, still holds him? But I will have him yet! Yes, so surely as we both shall live, I will have my old betrothed to stand with me before the marriage altar. I will have it so, because I will pay the price, whatever it might be. Whoever pays the price attains the end. Therein is the secret of success. Gerald Fitzgerald I will have for my bridegroom, because I will pay the price, though that price should be my soul's salvation. I have sworn it."

On this resolution and confidence inspired by it Geraldine rested for a time. Will she have the desire of her heart? Will she win Gerald Fitzgerald for her bridegroom, as she has sworn to do? Perhaps she will.

And what will be the price?

Something, it may be, that Miss Fitzgerald values far more than the salvation of her soul. Time will show.

Gerald Fitzgerald has a heart single to the memory of his dove-eyed Gertrude. The only other woman he thinks of is that wretched lunatic, who claims to possess an important secret, which he is hastening to hear from her dying lips. Of *her* he often thinks much.

CHAPTER VIII.

GERALD'S WEIRD.

ON the morning of the third day the stage-coach reached Wildeville, and drew up before the "Antlers."

Colonel Fitzgerald and his party were the only passengers on the coach. The Colonel came from his roost on the top, followed by his servant. He opened the door of the coach, and offered his hand first to Doctor Goodwin, and next to Geraldine, who lightly sprang to the ground. Jubal took out Meta and the parcels. Meanwhile, Mr. Estep, the landlord, followed by all the waiters, hostlers, and boys, poured out of bar-room and stable to meet the travellers returning from "foreign parts."

"Your humble servant, Miss Fitzgerald—this *is* a joyful surprise!—and most happy to see you back!" exclaimed the landlord, addressing the lady.

"I thank you, Mr. Estep. I am glad to get back," replied Geraldine, as she took the arm of Dr. Goodwin.

"And you, reverend sir, this *is* an unexpected pleasure. I am proud to see you here again," said the host.

"I am obliged to you, and thankful to be here, I assure you," returned the doctor.

"Welcome, Colonel Fitzgerald. This *is* a delightful surprise! Welcome home again!" cried the landlord.

"Thanks, Mr. Estep! I am glad to find you in the old place, and so hale and prosperous," said Gerald.

"Thank you, I am hearty myself; but when one hasn't got their own troubles to vex them, they have got some body else's to mourn over," said the landlord.

"I hope no misfortune has happened to any of our old neighbours, Mr. Estep?" said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Well, no, sir; nothing has happened to any of our old neighbours; but we have all heard of your affliction, and it has spread a gloom over the whole county, and that is a fact," said the landlord.

"My old friends are very good to remember me and my troubles," replied Colonel Fitzgerald, with a dignity that put an end to Estep's ill-advised condolences.

"Will you walk into the parlour, sir? It is quite a surprise to see you, sir, and Dr. Goodwin, and Miss Fitzgerald, too; though I did hear a rumour that you had been written to, to come home on some business; but I wasn't certain about it. Sit down, sir, if you please," said the landlord.

"Where is Miss Fitzgerald?" asked Gerald of Dr. Goodwin.

"She has retired to a bedroom with her maid. She will join us at breakfast. I have ordered breakfast for the party, Gerald; for we can scarcely go on to our homes with fasting stomachs," said the doctor.

"You were right, and I thank you, sir," replied Gerald. Then addressing the landlord he inquired:

"Can you tell me whether Magdala still lives?"

"Oh, yes, sir! A month—nearly three months ago—she was picked up in the woods in a dying condition, and conveyed to the alms-house. She sent for a priest, joined the Catholic Church, made her confession, received absolution, and took the sacrament. A month ago she was so low that she received extreme unction, was anointed for death; and she lay all night and day like one dead, except that her heart beat feebly. Then she grew stronger, until now, I hear, she is walking around the wards of the infirmary."

"Has the alms-house doctor his office under this hotel?"

"Yes, sir; but he is off to see a patient in the country now. Did you wish to see him?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell you where you will meet him—at the infirmary of the alms-house at ten o'clock. He always goes there at ten," said the landlord.

"Then let us have our breakfast as soon as possible, Mr. Estep, so that I may go and meet the doctor."

"All right, Colonel," replied the landlord.

Dr. Goodwin made an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" inquired the colonel.

"Why, here are our friends, Mr. and Miss Greenleaf, just driven up in their phæton."

"Who? Roy and Sue?" cried Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Yes, and here they are!" cried the doctor, facing around to meet them as Royal and Susan Greenleaf entered the parlour. But on seeing the travellers they stood aghast. They could not believe their own senses, until Dr. Goodwin took a hand of each and shook them, saying:

"Yes, it is true! Here we are! We have only just arrived! We left England for America so suddenly that we had no time to write you. The ship that would have brought our letter has brought ourselves. Come! Aren't you going to welcome us?"

"WELCOME YOU!—yes! But, confound it all! you've taken all my breath away!" shouted Royal Greenleaf, while he shook the doctor's hand to prove his lack of strength.

A cordial greeting followed.

"When did you hear from Geraldine, Colonel?" inquired Miss Greenleaf, as soon as they were seated.

"Geraldine returned under our escort, and is now in her room. We shall see her presently," replied Gerald.

"Oh! then I will go to her there," cried Miss Sue, who left the parlour to go in search of a chambermaid to show her Miss Fitzgerald's chamber.

"Now, how does it so fortunately happen that we meet here so soon?" inquired Dr. Goodwin.

"Oh, I drove my sister here this morning, to please her. You know Sue can't exist without novel, and there is a new novel out; and she has come here to buy it. That is all," replied Royal Greenleaf. Then, turning to Colonel Fitzgerald, he grasped his hand, crying:

"Do not suppose, Gerald, that I have not been thinking of you and your bereavement. I do believe that was the reason why Sue ran away. She could not bear to stay here without alluding to it, and—she could not bear to allude to it. But you know our Christian faith teaches us that all happens for the best," he concluded, as he turned away with much emotion.

"Thanks, Royal. If we could *feel*, as well as believe this truth, doubtless we should be better able to bear misfortune. Here come the ladies," said Gerald Fitzgerald, as Miss Sue Greenleaf and Geraldine Fitzgerald entered the room.

"Well, fair cousin, I am happy to welcome you home. We little thought when you went off to Washington that time, that you would clear out to Europe, and it would be near two years before we should see you again!" exclaimed Royal Greenleaf, as he shook hands with his quondam ward.

"I am glad to see you, Cousin Royal, and I hope I find you well," said Geraldine, coolly.

"Whenever was I anything else except I fasted overlong? I am well, my dear, a fact that I account for on the ground of my being always unmarried and unengaged —though at your service," added Royal Greenleaf.

The landlord appeared and announced breakfast.

Dr. Goodwin gave his arm to Geraldine, to take her into the dining-room.

Colonel Fitzgerald invited the two Greenleafs to join his party at breakfast; but Royal and Miss Sue assured him they had breakfasted two hours before, and it was too early for luncheon.

"We will go out and do the shopping that brought us to the village this morning," began Miss Sue.

"That means buy the novel," put in her brother.

"Then we will return here for Geraldine, who has decided to go home with us, and stay at Greenwood until her house at Mountain Manor can be put in order to receive her," concluded Miss Greenleaf.

"Is it there that you have decided to live, Geraldine?" inquired Gerald.

Miss Fitzgerald bowed in silence, thinking, "He can afford to be kind to me now that we are to part company within an hour."

"I have counselled her to live there in preference to any other of her manors, because it is nearest the Summit," explained Miss Sue.

"Well, good-morning. We will call within an hour to take Geraldine home with us," said Royal Greenleaf, as he offered his arm to his sister to take her to the sidewalk.

Miss Sue's purchase was soon made, and Mr. Greenleaf called at the post-office to get the letters for Greenwood, and they returned to the Antlers.

Here they found that the returned travellers had finished breakfast, and waited for them, to leave the hotel.

Royal Greenleaf ordered his horses to be put to the carriage, placed his sister and his late ward into their seats, and returned to take leave of Dr. Goodwin and Colonel Fitzgerald.

"I hope to see you very often at Greenwood, Gerald," he said at parting.

"I thank you, Royal; I shall do myself the pleasure to see you as often as possible during the period that I shall remain in the neighbourhood," replied Gerald.

"You are not going to leave us again!" exclaimed Royal.

"Yes, I must. I shall put my affairs in order and apply to be reinstated in the army and sent on active service. I hear that there are troubles brewing in California. I hope they will send me there."

"Come, come, Gerald, all this is morbid. Stay at home. Look after your estates. And in good time—"

"Stop, Royal. There are some subjects that must not be touched on between us. I thank you for your good wishes, but—good-by, old friend!" said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Good-by, Gerald! Heaven comfort you!" said Royal Greenleaf, hurrying to his carriage. "Yes, it is too early yet. He is too sore yet. But give him time, and Geraldine will bring him around," he added, as he took his seat before the ladies and drove off.

"Now, Dr. Goodwin, it is nearly ten o'clock, and we will go to the alms-house to meet the physician, and hear from the woman Magdala that terrible revelation which, she says, is to overwhelm the house of Fitzgerald in dishonour, but which neither you nor I believe," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Of course not. But come. Now for the secret!"

CHAPTER IX.

MAGDALA'S FLIGHT.

COLONEL FITZGERALD and Doctor Goodwin walked towards the alms-house, a new building of red sandstone, situated in the forest behind the village.

They passed through the gate admitting them into the grounds, inclosed by a low wall, and cultivated for the growth of vegetables for the use of the establishment.

They spoke to a pauper, who was hoeing a potato patch, and inquired if the doctor had arrived.

The man pointed to a distant part of the grounds, where the physician was in conversation with several of the attendants.

Colonel Fitzgerald and Dr. Goodwin hurried to the spot, from whence the warden and the physician hastened to meet them.

"Welcome home, Colonel! Welcome home, Doctor! I am rejoiced to see you!" exclaimed the physician.

"Not more so than we are to see you," responded Dr. Goodwin, speaking for both.

"Happy to see you back safe, gentlemen both, I'm sure," said the warden, cordially.

"Thanks, Mr. Fugit. We are pleased to see you looking so well. Life seems to have treated you kindly," said Gerald.

"Well, yes, sir. But there *are* vexations that try a man's soul! Now, only this morning, you see, sir—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Fugit. Dr. Shaw, can you take us to your patient, Magdala, or Clea, as she calls herself? I was glad to hear at the hotel that she was much better," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

The physician's face grew very grave, while the warden seemed anxious.

"Yes," said the doctor, "she is better, so much better, confound her, that she has levanted."

"She has—" began Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Levanted! bolted! sloped! vamosed!"

"For Heaven's sake, when? and why? and how?"

"This morning! Some busybody told her you and Dr. Goodwin had returned to the village, and she appears to have taken fright at the prospect of meeting, and has made off."

"It seems that you cannot much depend upon the wholly sane either. Who was it that told the woman of our arrival?" inquired Dr. Goodwin.

"Who was it, Mr. Fugit?" inquired the doctor.

"It was not I, nor any of my family. It was Molly Morton, who was one of the nurses in the infirmary for this week. She says that the gipsy was restless, and she told her the news to keep her still until the colonel should come. She was so anxious to see the colonel that any one might have fancied she would be quieted by hearing he had arrived. But it seems to have frightened her off the premises."

"But how did she escape?" demanded Dr. Goodwin.

"Oh, sir, she was not a prisoner. Since her improvement she has had the freedom of the house and grounds," answered the warden.

"Why was she not followed?" inquired Fitzgerald.

"No one saw her go, and she was not followed."

"When was she missed?" inquired the rector.

"Seen last about two hours ago. Not missed until the doctor came, half an hour ago, to pay his visit to her, when she could not be found."

"You have sent in pursuit of her?" said Gerald.

"Of course! The men with whom you saw us engaged, were receiving their orders to go in search of her. They have dispersed in various directions," said the physician.

"But since she is not a prisoner, upon what pretext can the men arrest her and constrain her to return?"

"Ah! that is provided for. Our Governor, thinking that I hadn't enough to do to keep me employed, has appointed me Justice of the Peace for the county. I have made out a warrant for her arrest as a vagrant—a necessary measure," replied the doctor.

"Poor creature!" sighed Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Now, Colonel, do not give yourself any anxiety about this woman. We shall get her before night. It is only a question of a few hours with our men," said the warden.

"I am glad you think so, Mr. Fugit. Pray do not let us detain you any longer from your duties. Dr. Shaw, can we have a word with you in private?"

"Certainly, Colonel. I was about to propose the same thing. Will you come with me to my office?"

"Thanks, yes. Come, Dr. Goodwin."

When the three gentlemen were seated in the office attached to the almshouse infirmary, Gerald said:

"Now, Doctor, I wish you to tell us all that you know of this woman Magdala, or Clea Phara."

"I know not a syllable more than I have written to you."

"Has she made any new allusion to the secret she claims to possess?"

"Not a word. There is only one new feature in the affair. She insisted, some weeks ago, in our advertising in all the American and European papers for Adam Lackland. Now, as that was an expensive proceeding, we declined to do it at her bidding, until her father confessor, at her suggestion, advised us to do so. We know Mr. Dubarry must have had strong reasons for the counsel he gave us; although he could not give us those reasons, without breaking the seal of confession."

"Doctor, you say 'we' and 'us'. Who was your coadjutor in all this trouble and expense?" asked Gerald.

"Mr. Greenleaf, of course."

"I ask because you must all be reimbursed for your generous outlay."

"There is no hurry, my dear Colonel."

"Thanks; but Dr. Goodwin and myself are interested in the return of this Adam Lackland on other accounts."

"Ah! indeed? May I inquire why?"

"Certainly. We have evidence to show that this Lackland married in England the missing daughter of Gabriel Haddon, of Haddon's Ferry, and of his wife, Lilian Vale, who, if living, is the heiress, through her mother, of very nearly half of Wilde county."

"You astound me, Colonel!" cried the physician.

"Why, since the deaths of old Hiram Slaughter and

of Gabriel Haddon, you have heard something of this missing daughter of Haddon?"

"Y-e-s, but only as a myth. I never thought anything would come of it," replied Dr. Shaw.

"Very little is likely to come of it, unless we can find Adam Lackland, and ascertain for a certainty whether his wife or their child still lives."

"They had a child, then?"

"Yes—a daughter. And she, if she still lives, is, in right of her mother and her grandmother, heiress 'as aforesaid,' of half Wilde county."

"And *what* an heiress. How the young fellows would go for her, if she were hump-backed and pock-marked. I should do so myself if I were a young man. But perhaps she is married," said Dr. Shaw.

"You forget. If Gabriel Haddon's daughter were living she could not be more than thirty-three years old. *Her* daughter could not be more than sixteen or seventeen," put in Doctor Goodwin.

Colonel Fitzgerald arose to take leave.

"Well, gentlemen, rest assured that every effort will be made to recover Magdala; and I have no doubt she will be brought back during the day," said the physician.

"I shall leave Jubal at the Antlers, Dr. Shaw, to wait your orders. May I request you, in case the woman should be brought back, to send him to me with notice of her return?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Certainly. You will be at the Summit, I presume?"

"Yes; I am going there to see if my people have left one stone upon the other of the old house, or whether they have pulled it down during my absence."

"Oh, it is all right up there. I was there yesterday to see your overseer's wife—"

"What! Old Oxton married again?"

"Yes, and his wife has just increased the wealth of the world by a fine brace of boys."

"This is his fourth wife, and those twin boys are his sixteenth and seventeeth children. If he goes on increasing his family, I shall have to increase his salary. But we are taking up the doctor's time. Good-day, sir."

"Good-day, Colonel. Make yourself easy about Magdala. We will find her," said the physician.

The gentlemen walked to the hotel, where they found a

large collection of friends, who had heard of their arrival at home and come to greet them.

Among the rest was the editor of "*The Wilde County Agricultural Chronicle and Commercial Advertiser.*" He had called on the travellers as a local reporter. He wanted to know the particulars of Colonel Fitzgerald's escape from the burning of the *Messenger*, and whether it was the Colonel's intention to live and die among his people. Gerald Fitzgerald begged to be excused from that theme.

The reporter "interviewed" Dr. Goodwin as to whether he would fill his pulpit on the next Sabbath.

Colonel Fitzgerald ordered a cold collation to be served for his friends. This delayed his journey to the Summit to so late an hour that he determined to defer it until next day. Gerald Fitzgerald walked over to the den with the flaming sign: "Office of the *Wilde County Agricultural Chronicle and Commercial Advertiser*," and put in an advertisement, offering a reward of five hundred dollars for the apprehension of Magdala, the gipsy, and her restoration to her friends.

Gerald Fitzgerald, leaving Jubal at the Antlers to wait for tidings, set out to ride to the Summit.

He reached home before noon, and met an enthusiastic welcome from his servants. He found all right. He only waited to hear tidings of Magdala before going to Washington, to ask to be reinstated in the army and sent West.

But weeks passed and no tidings of the fugitive was received. Colonel Fitzgerald lingered in the neighbourhood until two months had passed, without bringing any tidings either of Magdala, or of Adam Lackland.

Then, having put his affairs into order, he went to Washington, and sent in his application for reinstatement in the army.

His application was acted upon, and he was commissioned as a colonel of cavalry, and appointed to the command of a regiment under orders for San Francisco, California.

His commission and appointment were dated the first of July. His regiment was to go on the first of August. He had a month of leave to bid good-by to home and friends.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT ELSE COULD A GENTLEMAN DO?

COLONEL FITZGERALD returned to Wilde county to spend a month, before joining his regiment on August 1st.

On arriving at home, he learned that neither Adam Lackland nor Magdala had been heard from.

He learned that Miss Fitzgerald had taken possession of her beautiful home, the Mountain Manor House, whose estate joined his own; that Mrs. Doy was living with her as a chaperone, and Patricia as companion.

Knowing that his stay in the neighbourhood must be short, Colonel Fitzgerald relaxed a little from the regime of conduct he had prescribed for himself.

He could not but perceive that Geraldine still loved him. While he was resolved never to admit any other woman to Gertrude's place in his heart and home, he grew almost unconsciously more affectionate in his manner to his old sweetheart, and thus encouraged her hopes.

As for Geraldine, her whole character was made up of pride, passion, and self-will. She loved herself first and best, and next she loved Gerald——but loved him for her own sake. He was the most distinguished match in the county, and he was known to have been long attached to her before his marriage with the humble maiden whom he had lost; Geraldine's selfish pride, as well as her selfish love, was interested in her re-capture of Gerald.

Six months had elapsed since the burning of the *Messenger*, in which Gertrude was supposed to have been lost—time enough, Geraldine thought, for Gerald to get over the shock of his bereavement, and to think of his future life.

She did not know he had been reinstated in the army, and his regiment had been ordered to California.

She noticed that he came to see her more frequently, and that his manner toward her was more tender than formerly. And Geraldine judged from these circumstances, that he was preparing the way to renew their old relations as a betrothed pair. The first of August was at hand, and Geraldine was daily expecting some word from Gerald to express some wish or hope for a full restoration of their former relations, when one morning Colonel Fitzgerald called earlier than usual at the Mountain Manor House, and asked to see Miss Fitzgerald alone.

Geraldine felt sure now the long wished for explanation was to come off, and that when they next parted, they would part as betrothed lovers, who were to become husband and wife, as soon as the year of mourning for Gertrude should have elapsed.

She paused only long enough to add a few refining touches to her toilet of richly-embroidered India muslin —to put a cluster of scarlet geraniums in her raven-black hair, and among the folds of her bodice, and then went into the morning-room to receive Gerald.

This morning-room was on the first story of the octagonal tower of the Manor House, and occupied the whole floor, having one door communicating with the main building, and seven Gothic windows around it, looking down upon all sides of the wooded mountain as it descended to the Valley of the Wilde. It was furnished very simply with India matting on the floor, India shades at the windows, cane chairs around the walls, and a marble table, supporting a great China vase of fragrant flowers, in the midst.

Gerald was standing at one of the windows, looking on the valley with its rivers, when Geraldine entered, and greeted him with:

"Good-morning, cousin."

Gerald responded to her greeting, and placed a chair for her; and, as she sank into it, he brought another, set it by her side, and seated himself, saying:

"I am a very early visitor this morning, Geraldine, but I have a fair excuse—"

"Do you really need an excuse to call here at any hour, Gerald?" she inquired.

"Well, no; but one may happen to have what they do not need. And so I have a good excuse for breaking in upon your privacy at so unusual an hour."

Geraldine looked at him with curiosity and interest, but as she did not speak, Gerald continued:

"Dear cousin, I have come to take a long leave of you."

"'A long leave!' Oh, Gerald, where are you going?" burst from the lips of Geraldine, with more *real* emotion than she meant to betray, and which had more effect on Fitzgerald than any—even the most skilfully acted part—could have produced.

"My dear cousin, I am going to California."

"To California? What takes you so far from home?"

"I go in command of a regiment of cavalry ordered thither."

"Oh, Gerald! I did not know. This is so sudden!" she exclaimed. She had grown pale, and she pressed her hand upon her heaving bosom, for her heart was beating wildly.

Gerald Fitzgerald saw that her emotion was genuine and grievous. He pitied her from his heart; he took her hand in his own as he gently replied:

"My dearest cousin, surely this has not taken you so much by surprise? You know—"

"You never told me!" she exclaimed. "This *has* taken me most completely by surprise! It has fallen upon me like a thunderbolt!"

"My dearest girl," said Gerald, "do you not remember I told you long ago, that I intended to ask to be reinstated in the army, and to be sent on some active service?"

"Yes, but I had hoped you had got all over that feeling, and abandoned that project. It was five or six months ago that you mentioned it to me. Oh! I felt sure that you had given it up!"

"My dearest cousin, you know I have suffered an awful bereavement. I cannot rally from it here! I must go far away, and amid harassing duties, try to recover my lost manhood. I have applied to be reinstated in the army, and sent on active service along the Western frontier.

I have been commissioned as colonel of the —th Regiment of Cavalry, now under orders to start for San Francisco on the first of August. I am sorry that my departure gives you so much pain."

She did not reply to him. She was weeping from disappointed hopes, wounded affection and humbled pride! She was weeping more in rage than in grief, for she was more angry with him for having betrayed her into this display of feeling, than she was sorry for his departure.

Yet Gerald thought she was weeping only with sorrow for their separation, and so his heart bled with compassion for her. His loyalty to the memory of his lost wife was for the first time endangered. How he might have essayed to comfort his weeping cousin he did not know, for before he could utter another word Miss Fitzgerald had recovered some of her self-control and dignity, and she said to him, with stateliness:

"I have been behaving badly, Gerald; but—this has taken me by surprise, and—we are but two, you and I, the last of our respective houses, like brother and sister. It is hard to be divided! hard, even for you to leave me, though you go to new scenes and active duties—harder for me to remain alone in the old haunts! But you know what is best for you, Gerald, and I should bid you God-speed; and I do so with all my heart. Bid me good-by now, Gerald! Do not let us prolong this scene."

She placed both hands in his, and raised her dark eyes, now humid with unshed tears.

He drew her to his bosom, murmuring:

"Geraldine, my long ago child friend, good-bye! God forever bless you, my dear." And he strained her to his heart and pressed his lips to hers in a last embrace and kiss. Then he suddenly left the house.

He had intended to take leave of Miss Greenleaf and Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, but he felt he could not linger longer near Geraldine, and he resolved to write them a farewell letter from the Summit.

He rode down the bridle-path leading through the thickly wooded pass to the Summit Manor House thinking: "My little Gertrude, my loving angel, did you see that? And do you think I love you less for all that? You will know I can never love you less, when I meet you in heaven, my angel!"

Next morning Colonel Fitzgerald set out for Washington, where, three days later, he arrived and reported.

He took command of his regiment, and began to make arrangements for departure.

But Cabinet ministers are as changeable as the wind. On the last day of embarkation, for some reason best known to the War Department, the secretary changed his mind about the destination of Colonel Fitzgerald's regiment, and instead of sending it to the Pacific coast, sent it to Wendover in West Virginia, within thirty miles of Wildeville.

Colonel Fitzgerald had nothing to do but obey orders. So set out on his march to his new post of duty, where, in a week, he found himself settled in uncongenial society and with nothing to do.

He was so vexed at this change that he did not write home to his friends in Wildeville to apprise them of the fact.

Royal Greenleaf read of it first in the newspapers, and instead of writing to Colonel Fitzgerald, he rode over to see him.

Gerald was glad to see his old friend, and pressed him to prolong his visit.

Royal Greenleaf accepted the invitation, and promised to remain for a week as the guest of Colonel Fitzgerald.

In the evening, the two gentlemen talked about the affairs of their native county. Mr. Greenleaf told him that no news had been heard of either Adam Lackland or Magdala. But that all the people he had left behind him were well, with the exception of Miss Fitzgerald.

"I don't know what is the matter with Geraldine," added that artful dodger, for he knew well, or *thought* he knew, that she was pining from the effects of disappointed love, when, in fact, she was sickening of humbled pride.

"Is my cousin not well?" asked Fitzgerald.

"I should think not! She neither eats, drinks, nor sleeps! She has gone away to a skeleton! And she is so nervous that she bursts into tears if one does but crook a finger at her."

"I am sorry to hear this," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Sue and Doy are trying to persuade her to go travelling with them. But she won't hear of it. Though if

she were a sister of mine, I would carry her off to some watering-place, whether or no!"

Gerald Fitzgerald sighed and wished that Geraldine had a lover to her mind. "For I cannot give her your place, my little Gertrude! my angel wife! I can give no woman your place in my heart and home," he added, mentally.

Mr. Greenleaf left Wendover at the end of a week, having exacted a promise from Gerald to visit them at Christmas.

Colonel Fitzgerald remained with his regiment at Wendover during September, October and November.

Mr. Greenleaf wrote interesting letters, full of gossip. In one letter, dated October the 15th, he wrote:

"What do you think! There has been a German prince here—that sandy-headed behemoth she met at the French minister's in Washington three years ago.

"He's travelling through the country, it seems.

"He was staying at Blue Cliffs, as the guest of Governor Cavendish, shooting over his grounds, and seeing Virginian sport, and he came here on a visit.

"He stopped at the 'Antlers,' but rode over to see ME, of all men in the world.

"And what do you think he did then? Why he asked ME for the hand of my ward, 'Mademoiselle Geraldine.'

"I told him I had nothing to do with 'Mademoiselle' Geraldine's marriage, and didn't want to have, and if I knew myself I wouldn't have. That 'Mademoiselle' Geraldine was her own woman, and a very self-willed woman at that. And so I referred him to herself. Geraldine sent him off with a 'flea in his lug,' and he is gone.

"I cannot think what can be the matter with Geraldine. Is there another girl in the length and breadth of the land who would have refused to become a princess if she had the opportunity! And the fellow is not ill looking, if he *is* a prince; he is neither old nor ugly; he is only big and boorish, and that's nothing."

Colonel Fitzgerald sighed over this letter, and wished that Geraldine could have responded to the German behemoth's love. "For I have no love to give her. Gertrude, my love is yours, and yours only, my angel wife! It was enough, my darling, that I left you to perish in the waves while I saved her life. I cannot give her the

heart which is sacred to you, my little angel—sacred as a shrine!"

Early in December Royal Greenleaf, at the end of a long, gossipping letter, wrote :—

"Geraldine is staying at Greenwood. The Mountain Manor House is too bleak and cold for her in her delicate health. Greenwood is sheltered by hills and trees. So Sue and Doy have brought Geraldine here. Yet she grows no better. I cannot think what is the matter with that girl! She wanes every day, yet utterly refuses to see a physician. It is simply terrible to see a fine young woman like Geraldine perishing before one's very eyes, without any visible disease that one can take hold of and treat."

All this was very annoying to Gerald Fitzgerald. He began to feel in some measure responsible for Geraldine's condition. If she were dying of a "mind diseased," that disease was disappointed affection. He never suspected it to be humbled pride.

Colonel Fitzgerald kept his appointment with Royal Greenleaf, and near Christmas rode to Greenwood to spend the holidays there.

He arrived three days before Christmas. He was cordially welcomed by every member of the family, except by Miss Fitzgerald, who was still staying at Greenwood, but did not make her appearance.

"She very seldom comes down stairs now, but I think she will join us at supper to-night," said Royal Greenleaf in answer to Colonel Fitzgerald's inquiries.

"Is there any improvement?" inquired Fitzgerald.

"Not the least—she declines daily. She is dying, sir, and she knows it. *She has made her will.*"

"Eh!" exclaimed Fitzgerald, aghast.

"She has made her will. I was one of the witnesses. She left the Mountain Manor to you, saying in her will that she does it because she wishes that the two halves of the old colonial estate, the Mountain Manor and the Summit Manor, may be united again."

"Good Heaven! Greenleaf, this is very shocking. Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing that I know of. She won't even see a physician for *us;* perhaps she might for you. But if you are ready, come down to supper."

Colonel Fitzgerald followed his friend to the drawing-room, where Miss Greenleaf, Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, saucy Pat. Fitz., and Billy Bowers awaited them.

"Come, is supper ready?" asked Royal Greenleaf.

"Yes, we are only waiting for Geraldine. She has promised to join us this evening," said Sue.

At that moment Miss Fitzgerald appeared. But how changed! yet how beautiful, even in deathliness! She wore a black velvet dress with point lace about her throat and wrists; her black hair carried back from her forehead, and rolled in a knot at the nape of her neck. This black costume brought into startling effect the whiteness of her face, while her dilated eyes looked large. She entered with hesitating steps.

Gerald Fitzgerald hastened to meet her, addressed some words of affectionate greeting to her, drew her arm within his own, and led her to a seat.

She received his attentions with a gentle smile, and thanked him.

He seated himself beside her and looked at her with interest. He was stricken to the heart.

He sat by her until supper was announced. Then he took her to the table, and showed her every attention.

When supper was over he led her to the drawing-room, and devoted himself to her during the evening. When the hour for retiring came, he supported her from the parlour, and did not leave her until he bade her good-night at the door of her chamber.

But that night, when Gerald went to rest, his thoughts were not of Geraldine.

"Oh, my little Gertrude! My angel wife, do you see what I am going to do? And do you forgive me? Yes, you do, my angel! You love without self-love, little angel!" and so murmuring, he fell asleep.

Of course my readers have seen how this struggle must end.

Colonel Fitzgerald spent a month at Greenwood, and before he rejoined his regiment he proposed to Geraldine and was accepted. Under the circumstances, what else could a gentleman do?

CHAPTER XI.

GERTRUDE'S WEDDING RING.

WE must return to our heroine.

After a voyage around the Horn, lasting many months, during which the passengers of the *Becky* experienced all the vicissitudes of such a protected sea trip, they anchored in the harbour of San Francisco. To the weary survivors of the wreck, after weeks of hoping, the sight of land and anticipation of their arrival at their homes, among loved ones and friends, the announcement of land was exhilarating.

We will not burden our readers with the recital of the wearisome and unvarying minutiæ of that long voyage. The heart burnings and yearnings were for the nonce forgotten in the stir and confusion incidental to landing. The sailors were noisy in getting up the cargo out of the hold.

The passengers who had been rescued by the *Becky* were gathering up their effects to go on shore. Captain Wailes found time to come to Gertrude to say:

"Do not be in a hurry to leave the ship. Wait with your escort until I speak to you. You have given up all idea of going by the 'overland route?'"

"Oh, yes, Captain Wailes. I will wait and return by the *Becky*. But I will write by the overland mail and tell Colonel Fitzgerald all about it," replied Gertrude.

"That is right. I have to run up to see my consignees; but I will be back in an hour; remain until I come."

"I will do so, very thankfully," replied Gertrude.

The captain hurried away, and Sallust Rowley joined her, saying:

"I have been on shore to pick up late newspapers,

Here are some New York and Washington papers, dated July 1st, that arrived by the last overland mail."

Gertrude received the papers, and opened one—not that she expected to find anything of personal interest to herself. Woman-like she first turned to the "Marriages" and "Deaths," but met no familiar name. Then she cast her eyes down the other columns, when her glance was arrested by the following intelligence:

COLONEL GERALD FITZGERALD.

We are happy to announce that this gallant and distinguished officer, who won unfading laurels in the wars of Florida and of Mexico, has been appointed to the command of the 8th Regiment of Cavalry and ordered to California. The regiment will probably reach San Francisco about the first of September.

Gertrude sprang up with a cry of delight.

"WHAT'S THE MATTER?" cried Sallust Rowley. "Is it a tarantula? The place is full of them!"

"Oh, Cousin Sallust!" cried Gertrude. "What do you think? Such a delightful surprise! Colonel Fitzgerald is on his way to California, and will be here on the first of September—in a week from this!"

"EH!"

"Read for yourself," cried Gertrude, as she pointed out the paragraph referring to Colonel Fitzgerald. She bewildered Sallust, unable to free his mind from its first impression of a tarantula, puckered up his fair, broad forehead into knots, his slender fingers into his red hair, and then took the paper and read the paragraph in question.

"Here's a jolly go!" was his only comment.

"Oh, Cousin Sallust, did you ever know anything so fortunate, so marvellous?" cried Gertrude.

"It *does* seem too strange to be true," observed Mr. Rowley, laying down his paper.

"But it *is* true. There can be no mistake about that!" said Gertrude, confidently.

"Certainly not. It is true enough, only it seems too good to be true," answered Sallust.

"Now I need not trouble myself to devise means to get home. Gerald will be here in a week!" cried Gertrude.

"How good Captain Wailes will be. And how glad. He will be almost as much rejoiced as I am, for he *was* anxious about me, that kind captain. And I hope the *Becky* won't sail for a week longer, for then Colonel Fitzgerald will be able to see Captain Wailes, and to thank him for all his fatherly care of me."

"The *Becky* sail in a week? She won't sail in ten days, I am thinking, with the cargo she has got to get *out* and the cargo she has got to get *in*," said Mr. Rowley.

"Then they will meet, and two rarely noble souls will know each other," exclaimed Gertrude.

"Hum, yes! Wailes is a brick. If he hadn't been, he'd pitched some of those grumbling persons into the sea. Yes, no doubt of it—Wailes is a brick."

"Well," said Gertrude, "and—"

"And Fitzgerald's a brick, also. Oh, yes. I would not be so impolite as to insinuate otherwise," added Sallust.

Gertrude was not satisfied.

"You *know*," she said, "that Colonel Fitzgerald is second to no man on earth in nobility of principle and conduct!"

"My dear Mrs. Fitzgerald, I know all that you order me to know. They are both bricks, and so are you. What more can I say? And here comes one of the bricks —the captain of the *Becky!*" added Sallust, as Captain Wailes came on board.

He did not join them, but stopped in consultation with a gentleman who seemed to have been waiting for him on the deck.

"Now, Cousin Gertrude, where shall we spend the time before the arrival of the Fitzgerald brick? Remember we have not decided upon anything yet, and nearly all our fellow-passengers have left the ship."

"I would not decide on any course until I have consulted Captain Wailes. He requested me to wait here until his return. And you know, Cousin Sallust, that my position is now one of delicacy and embarrassment, requiring the guidance of just such a good and wise man as he is," answered Gertrude.

By this time the captain of the *Becky* seemed to have finished what he had to say, for he bowed and left the ship. Captain Wailes hastened to Gertrude, saying, "I

fear I have kept you waiting; but I have been occupied in your service, and successfully also, as I am happy to add—Eh! What's all this? Bless me, what is it?" he demanded, as he met Gertrude.

"Oh! Captain Wailes! Just read that!" she cried, pointing out to him the paragraph relating to Colonel Fitzgerald.

"How? What? This is news! I congratulate you with all my heart!" cried the captain of the *Becky*, as he shook hands with Gertrude.

"Oh, I feel as if I could never be sufficiently thankful for this happy coincidence!" cried Gertrude.

"Yes, she was down in the abyss a while ago! Now she is up in the empyrean! But it is time to think of shelter, rest and food. There go the last of your passengers, except ourselves," put in Mr. Rowley.

"Excuse me, and I will explain," said Captain Wailes, as he started in pursuit of the people who were leaving the ship,—to bid them good-by.

When he had performed this duty he came back to Gertrude and Sallust.

"I have thought of all that, and provided for it," he said, in answer to Mr. Rowley's observation. Then he added: "I told you, Mrs. Fitzgerald, that I had been occupied in your service. I went from the counting-house of my consignees to the dwelling of a relation of mine who came out with him to San Francisco years ago. And you will understand me when I tell you I bring an invitation from the Reverend Doctor and Mrs. Fleming to you, to come as their guest during your stay in San Francisco. With your consent I am to bring you to them this evening."

"Oh, Captain Wailes, when will you cease to heap benefits upon me?" exclaimed Gertrude.

"When you are safe under the protection of your gallant husband, my dear."

"Oh, Captain Wailes, how can I ever repay you for all your kindness?"

"By accepting all my service with the frankness with which it is offered. I do for you what I should hope any good father would do for my daughter were she placed in your circumstances. It would not be discreet in you to go to a hotel or to a boarding-house. You must become

the guest of a private family of respectability, such as that of the Rev. Dr. Fleming. My Cousin Caroline and her husband will be happy to receive you. You will find Caroline as cheery as a bird, and the rector as companionable and delightful as—as"

"As you are yourself, dear Captain Wailes!" replied Gertrude.

"Thank you, my child," said the captain of the *Becky*.

Then turning to his other passenger, he said:

"And you, Mr. Rowley, I hope, will make the *Becky* your headquarters. We find our quarters here pleasanter than they would be at the hotels. Will you stay with us?"

"Well, Captain," cried Mr. Rowley, "now you do stun a man with your kindness. I know you are a brick! I was saying so to my cousin when you came on board. And if it would not be imposing on your hospitality—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the captain. "With Burrows and Estep and myself, you will make a fourth hand at whist in the evenings! Now it is settled that you stay with us in port until you go with us to sea. For you will go back with us, will you not?" inquired the captain.

"Of course, sir!"

"Now, Mrs. Fitzgerald, I am going to send a man on shore to fetch a carriage." The captain walked aft.

In a few moments a sailor came, and announced the carriage waiting on the wharf.

"Come, my dear," said the captain, offering Gertrude his arm. "Come, I have persuaded your cousin to spend the evening with my relations," he added, as he led the way to the carriage followed by Sallust Rowley.

The driver drove off, and in half an hour drew up before a rectory beside a church.

The captain alighted, paid the hack, and conducted his companions to the house-door, where he rang.

The rector received them with a cordial welcome and introduced them to his wife. After which she presented to the visitors her three daughters—Mary, sixteen; Catherine, fourteen; and Rebecca, twelve.

"And now, Mrs. Fitzgerald, I will take you to your room, where you can lay off your hat, while the gentlemen entertain themselves," said Mrs. Fleming.

She conducted her guest to a handsomely furnished front chamber over the drawing-room.

"This is to be your apartment as long as you stay. My cousin, George Wailes, tells me you expect your husband in a week," said Mrs. Fleming.

"I thank you. Yes, I expect Colonel Fitzgerald on the first of September," replied Gertrude, as she laid off her hat and drew off her gloves, touched her hair before the glass, and then announced herself ready to go below.

"My Cousin George tells me you have been twice wrecked—first in the *Messenger*, that was burned in the Straits of Dover, and on the *Zanzibar*, that was lost on an island of ice, off the coast of Newfoundland," said Mrs. Fleming.

"Yes, madam," quietly answered Gertrude.

"Some of these days, while you stay with us, I want you to tell me *all* about it," said the lady, as she opened the door and led the way into the drawing-room.

The rising of Dr. Fleming to offer his guest a chair, and the necessity of accepting the courtesy and thanking the rector, relieved Gertrude of the necessity of compromising herself by giving her promise to relate the particulars of a story of which she could not even bear to think.

Tea was announced, and the voyagers were invited into the dining-room, which was immediately in the rear of the drawing-room, where they had the pleasure of sitting down for the first-time in nearly seven months to a table that *stood perfectly still*, besides being laden with all the luxuries and delicacies of the season; among which the most acceptable were the fresh luscious fruits of the summer, from which they had been so long debarred.

After supper they had music, conversation, and readings, until the hour for retirement arrived, when Captain Wailes and Sallust Rowley took leave and returned to their ship.

After the evening worship, Mary Fleming, the eldest daughter of the house, accompanied the guest to her bedroom and bade her good-night at the door.

Gertrude entered, turned the key and looked around upon the large and airy chamber, the wide French bedstead, the broad wash-stand, and the various easy resting chairs, with a sense of comfort and satisfaction only to be

appreciated by those who have come off a long and weary sea-voyage.

Gertrude had not occupied a chamber, or slept in a wide bed, since she left Southampton in the preceding February.

Now she thoroughly enjoyed their comforts. She offered up her private thanksgivings and prayers, and then retired to rest.

Being now entirely freed from anxiety, calmer, and happier than she had felt since her sudden and terrible separation from her husband, she soon fell asleep, and slept peacefully until morning.

She awoke, astonished to find herself on a broad French bedstead, in a light and spacious chamber, instead of in her narrow berth in the cabin of the *Becky*.

But memory soon returned, bringing back the scene of her arrival at San Francisco, and reception by the rector's family, and above all, the joyous thought that in less than a week she should meet her husband, and of how amazed, how enraptured he would be to find her rescued and living! What words would he be able to express his joy and gratitude! How devoutly he would thank Heaven! how fervently he would acknowledge his obligations to brave Sallust Rowley and noble George Wailes!

But she scarcely dared to dwell on this thought; it excited her too much; it unfitted her for the companionship of her kind host and hostess; made her almost oblivious indeed of their existence. She stepped lightly out of bed and began to make her morning toilet.

She had nothing better than the plain brown merino dress and white linen collars and cuffs that had been supplied her by the captain's bounty while she was on the *Becky;* but she dressed herself neatly in these, and was about to go down stairs, when she was stopped by a gentle rap at her room door.

She opened it, and saw the fair-haired little Rebecca timidly standing there.

"If you please, ma'am, my mamma sent me to ask if I could help you any, and tell you breakfast would be on the table at eight o'clock," said the little maiden.

"Thank you, love; it is very kind of mamma and you.

Can you tell me the time?" inquired Gertrude, caressing the child's fair curls.

"A quarter to eight, ma'am."

"Then I think we will go down," said our little lady, taking the child's hand, and leading her along.

They found Mrs. Fleming and the two elder girls in the morning-room, waiting for the rector.

All greeted Gertrude with affectionate warmth, and made her sit by the window, until the rector entered, whereupon they went into the adjoining room, where the breakfast was served.

The rector handed his guest to her seat, and all plied her with kindly attentions.

The Chinaman waited on the table as before, and was addressed by Dr. and Mrs. Fleming as John, and by the young people as Ah Fum, Ah Fun, Aw Ful, etc. The good-humoured heathen took it all in good part, and answered with equal promptitude to either name.

After breakfast the rector set out to make sick calls on some of his parishioners. The three girls went, by previous appointment, to spend a day with one of their schoolmates, for this was the last week in August, and the summer vacation was not yet over. And Mrs. Fleming carried off Gertrude to the privacy of the matron's own pleasant sewing-room, and having seated her in a comfortable rocking-chair, said:

"Now, my dear, tell me all about your two shipwrecks. I am dying to hear. Begin with the burning of the *Messenger*, as that was the first. There must be something superlatively awful about the burning of a ship at sea."

Thus adjured, what could Gertrude do but recall all the horrors of that horrible night to entertain little Mrs. Fleming, who, seated in her low sewing-chair, engaged in embroidering a pair of slippers for the rector, enjoyed the story at her ease.

But from all the details of the burning of the *Messenger*, Gertrude left out the name of Geraldine, partly because she could not bear to speak of it in that connection, and partly because there was no real necessity for her doing so. Of her own personal adventures, she only said that she was in the womens' boat when it was swamped, and was rescued, in an insensible condition, by Mr. Rowley.

When her story was completed, Mrs. Fleming said:

"Now tell me of the loss of the *Zanzibar* on the ice."

Gertrude gave her the narrative.

Mrs. Fleming startled Gertrude by asking:

"Do you know of any other shipwreck you could tell me about?"

Before Gertrude could reply, John Chinaman made his mistress understand that "the big, large captain had come, and wanted to see leetle missee alone with herself."

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN WAILES' NEWS.

"HE means that George has called to see you. You had better go down to him," said Mrs. Fleming.

"'George'?" repeated Gertrude, in perplexity.

"Captain Wailes, you know," explained Mrs. Fleming.

"Oh, yes. I will go down at once," exclaimed Gertrude, as she followed the chinaman.

John opened the drawing-room door. There was no one in the room except Captain Wailes, and he was walking up and down the floor with a very disturbed countenance. He turned as Gertrude entered the room.

She saw from his look that he had ill news to tell her, and she exclaimed:

"Oh, Heaven! Captain Wailes, what has happened? My husband! Have the Indians—"

She sank half fainting on the nearest chair.

"Nothing has happened half so bad as your fears suggest. Colonel Fitzgerald is safe and sound," said Captain Wailes, soothingly.

"Oh, what is it then? Will he not come? Oh, do not say he will not come," she pleaded.

"*You* have said it, my child," answered the captain.

"Gerald not come! Oh, how is that? How do you

know? Who told you? Oh, Captain Wailes!" she wailed.

"It is a cruel disappointment, I know, but bear up. You have been so brave to endure, all this time. Be brave and strong still!" urged Captain Wailes.

"Oh, I cannot! I have borne so much!" moaned Gertrude, breaking into hysterical sobs.

"Come, my child, listen to me," began the good seaman; but she wildly interrupted him.

"Oh! Captain Wailes, is it true? How did you know it? Who told you? Oh, can it be true?" she exclaimed.

"It is too true. An overland mail came in this morning with the news. I read it in a Washington paper. It seems the colonel's regiment, that was to have been sent here, received countermanding orders, and has been sent to Virginia instead. I came to break the news to you, lest some thoughtless person might speak of it in your presence, before you should be prepared to hear it. But your intuitions divined my news."

"Oh! where is that paper? Let me see it, Captain Wailes. Perhaps there may be some mistake, and some hope. Let me see the paper."

"I left it behind; but there is no need for you to see the paper. It is as I tell you. Colonel Fitzgerald's regiment has been countermanded and ordered to Virginia, and Colonel Clingman's regiment has been sent here in its stead, and will arrive in a few days."

Gertrude broke into loud, irrepressible sobs.

"Come, my brave girl, this is not like yourself!"

"Captain Wailes, I am weary of life!" she sobbed.

"Tut! Listen to me now! Why, you are not worse off than you were yesterday morning when we landed, before you heard the false report that Colonel Fitzgerald would be here in a week! *Then* you were glad that so much of our voyage was over, and that we had only to go home again. But the report about Colonel Fitzgerald's expected arrival here on the first of September raised false hopes that are disappointed; that is all! Forget you ever heard that false report, or entertained that fallacious hope! Consider that though you will not see your husband next week, you will be sure to see him in a few months. You can write to him, you know,

by the overland mail, and he will be expecting you," said the kind-hearted sailor, as he stood by her side, and stroked her poor little bowed head with his large, magnetic hand.

Her sobs became less and less convulsive.

At length, with a deep, shuddering sigh, she wiped her eyes, looked up, and said, very meekly:

"I am sorry, Captain Wailes, that I gave way so; but it was such a sudden blow, and oh, such a disappointment! Such a disappointment!"

"I know it, my poor dear child, I know it. But let hope arise out of this disappointment."

"But oh, Captain Wailes, I have hoped so much, and hoped so vainly! Oh! it seems as if there were a fate in all this, and that I shall never see my husband's face in this world again!" cried Gertrude, on the verge of another paroxysm of grief. But she bravely controlled her feelings on this occasion.

"I'm blest if you shan't see his face again, then, and within five months from this day, at the very farthest too!" exclaimed the good captain, confidently. "We all have these misgivings when we have been foiled two or three times in succession; they mean nothing. Come, cheer up, my child. The faithful old *Becky*,

'Who never, never feared a foe,
And never failed a friend,'

will sail in a week from to-day, and you shall sail on her. Then every minute and every mile will take you nearer and nearer home. We shall not stop until we reach port. We shall be going on even while we sleep. Think of that. Meantime, to-day you had better write a long letter to Colonel Fitzgerald. There will be a mail start for the East to-morrow morning."

"By the overland route?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, I have a great mind to go with it even now," exclaimed Gertrude, excitedly.

"My child, you would not be permitted to do so," said the captain, who wished to put a prompt *quietus* on this proposed movement.

"How—not permitted to go if I wished to do so?" inquired Gertrude, anxiously.

"No, my child."

"But why?"

"Because the Indians of the plains are now more troublesome than ever before, and no women can be allowed to travel in this way until tranquility is restored. No, you must be patient, my dear. And put your trust, under Divine Providence, in Captain Wailes and the *Becky*."

"'God bless Captain Wailes and the *Becky*!' Amen. But, oh, it is so long, so long to wait until we get home. And then—some unexpected misfortune may happen still to defer my meeting with my husband," she sighed.

"You must not think so—nothing is going to happen to prevent that joyous meeting. I will not permit anything to happen! Oh, I wish I could put you into a Rip Van Winkle sleep that should last the whole voyage, and then wake you up at the end of it!"

"Indeed, I wish so too, Captain Wailes. But you do every possible good for me always, and it does seem so thankless in me to fret as I have done to-day. I beg you will forgive me, and believe how really grateful I am to you."

"I know, I know, my dear. Talk no more about that," said the captain, hastily.

"But when Colonel Fitzgerald shall receive me safe from your hands, oh, *he* will show you how grateful he is!" she explained.

"Yes! I look forward to meeting the gallant colonel with the greatest pleasure. I expect great things from that meeting," said the captain, heartily, for he was pleased to see Gertrude's thoughts taking a more hopeful turn.

"You cannot expect too much, dear Captain Wailes."

"Well, my brave little lady, I am glad to see you more like yourself again. Now I will leave you to write your letter. He will get it in three or four weeks, remember. It is something to be in a place where you can write to him, is it not?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"Of course. Well, my child, I have to run down to the ship. Good-morning."

"Captain Wailes!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Will you be here again to-day?"

"Yes, child; I shall come for your letter, so that I can see it off myself. Good-morning."

On his way out of the house the captain met the rector coming in, and told him of the severe disappointment that had just fallen upon his guest, and recommended the latter to his sympathies.

Dr. Fleming promised to do the best he could to reconcile the hapless young creature to her fate, and having seen the captain out, hurried to the drawing-room to look after Gertrude.

But the little lady, hearing the approach of her host, and feeling unequal to the interview, hastened away and found solitude in the privacy of her own room.

There her lately restrained feelings found vent in a flood of tears, and she wept long and freely before she became calm enough to commence her letter to Colonel Fitzgerald.

She found a little writing-table in her room, which, upon examination, proved to be well stocked with every requisite writing material.

She sat down and began her letter, giving a narrative of all the strange events that had befallen her since her sudden separation from her husband, on that awful night of the fire at sea, and pouring out her soul's long pent-up emotions as she wrote.

She filled page after page, never thinking of the passage of time, until a knock at her chamber-door heralded the entrance of the Chinaman, who came to call her to dinner.

At the table the rector and his wife were the only members of the family present; the children having gone, as I said, to spend the day with one of their schoolmates; but they, Dr. and Mrs. Fleming, though they wisely forebore to allude to Gertrude's disappointment, yet, by their increased tenderness of manner towards her, proved that they knew all about it, and meant to do all in their power to comfort and cheer her.

After dinner, Gertrude resumed her writing, and wrote until she was summoned to tea.

She found Captain Wailes in the drawing-room, waiting for her letter.

"Is it ready, my child?" he inquired.

"Not quite. Have I no more time?"

"Why, you must be writing a book of voyages!" said the captain, jocosely.

"I am. Must I seal it up now?"

"Not immediately. You have two hours yet; but the letter must be mailed before nine o'clock."

"Oh, I shall have finished it before that time," replied Gertrude.

The entrance of the rector was the signal to go to tea.

Dr. Fleming gave his arm to Mrs. Fitzgerald. Captain Wailes took Mrs. Fleming, and they went to the table. Ah Fum waited, with his usual careful punctiliousness.

After tea, Gertrude excused herself, and went to her room to finish her letter, which proved to be so bulky that she had to put it in a box-envelope which she found in the drawer of her writing table. Then she directed it, in a very distinct hand, and took it down stairs.

Captain Wailes made an exclamation of amazement when he saw it.

But he immediately took possession of it, bade his friends good-night, and went out to post it.

"Poor child! poor child!" he said, as he hurried towards the post-office. "Now there is just about ten chances to one that this great letter ever reaches the man for whom it is intended."

And here I may as well tell my readers that the honest captain's forebodings proved to be well founded, and that Gertrude's long, full letter never did reach Gerald Fitzgerald. It fell into the hands of the Apaches, and was used as wadding for the guns, with which they attacked and killed the very next pony express.

Fortunately Gertrude did not dream of such a fate for her letter. After having written it she felt in better spirits; and when the little girls returned home from their visit to their schoolmate, which they did a few minutes after the departure of Captain Wailes, Gertrude was able to join them in their little round game of "Poets" with some interest.

The evening concluded, as the preceding one had done, with family worship.

Then Gertrude bade her kind host good-night, and retired to her chamber.

Ah! with what different feelings to those with which

she had entered it on the preceding night! Then she had been full of hope; now, of bitter disappointment.

The contrast was too much for her composure. Again she broke down into a violent fit of weeping.

She went to bed, but could not sleep until near morning, when she fell into disturbed slumbers.

She arose at the usual hour, and, after making her toilet, she went down stairs to join the family at breakfast.

They greeted her with the greatest kindness, the rector promising to take her out that morning for a drive with his wife to see the city.

Gertrude was really indifferent to all sight-seeing just at this time. She could think of nothing, feel nothing, but her vehement, intense desire to get home. Yet, knowing that her kind hosts meant her well, she courteously accepted their kind offer, and went with them.

But nothing interested her, not even the curious "Chinese Quarters," which Dr. Fleming assured her was like a slip of Canton cut out and engrafted on San Francisco.

Then, Dr. Fleming thinking that the sight of other people's misery might draw her thoughts from brooding over her own troubles, drove through one of the most squalid quarters of the "Old City," where people of all nationalities seemed to be collected in the utmost destitution.

This aroused the tender-hearted girl. She put her hand into her empty pocket in search of the portmonnaie that had been lost months before. And then she turned with a look of despair to Dr. Fleming. He put his alms-purse in her hands, as he might have put it in those of a child, to please it, and said:

"Be my almoner to-day, Mrs. Fitzgerald."

"Oh, a thousand thanks!" she exclaimed, as she received the purse, and began to distribute the small pieces of silver, with which it had been purposely filled.

And what surprised the rector and his wife very much was that this simple young woman spoke to all these people of various nationalities—French, Italian, Spanish, German—in their native languages; and, as far as the rector could judge, with a perfect accent.

When the alms-purse was empty, the rector ordered the carriage to drive home.

On their arrival, Gertrude thanked Dr. and Mrs. Fleming for the pleasant ride they had given her, and turned to go up to her room, when she noticed a newspaper lying on the hall table.

She picked it up, and saw that it was the morning paper.

"May I take this for a few moments?" she inquired, thinking that perhaps this would be likely to have copied the paragraph about Colonel Fitzgerald from the Washington paper that had arrived the day before.

"Oh, certainly, for as long as you please," promptly answered the rector.

She thanked him and ran up stairs.

As soon as she had shut her door she sat down without removing her hat or gloves, and eagerly examined the paper.

At the head of the first column of the first page she found what she was looking for—LATEST FROM WASHINGTON.

It was the paragraph copied word for word from the *National Intelligencer*, and briefly announcing the change of orders which sent Colonel Fitzgerald to Virginia and Colonel Clingman in his stead to California.

But on turning to the inside of the sheet Gertrude found a short editorial on the subject, expressive of much dissatisfaction at the change, and ending with these significant words:

"We do not know the reason of this extraordinary movement, which has withdrawn an officer of great military skill and experience, and long service in and thorough acquaintance with this section of the country, to place a new man in command; but a private correspondent writes, it is whispered in Washington circles *that there is a fair lady in the case.*"

"I do not believe it," said Gertrude, earnestly to her stricken heart.

But though she said she did not believe it, the shaft had pierced her bosom and rankled there.

All her former fears in regard to Geraldine revived, and her intense anxiety to be at her husband's side arose to fever heat.

"But in three weeks, or four at farthest," she said,

"he will get my letter; he will know that I live, that I am coming, and he will rejoice! for he loves me—my husband loves me—I know that he loves me."

These words were so like balm to her wounded heart, that she said them over and over to herself.

Her love was immortal; but, ah! the struggle she had to keep her faith and hope alive! Yet in that struggle the tender heart grew strong, as it was sweet. In the evening the captain of the *Becky* and Mr. Sallust Rowley came to tea.

After tea Gertrude sat down to the piano and played and sang some of the finest compositions of modern masters, and with such admirable execution that when she ceased an acclamation of surprise and delight arose.

"Colonel Fitzgerald procured the best teachers for me when I was in Europe," she said, simply, in explanation of her accomplishment.

When Captain Wailes arose to bid her good-night, he said: "My dear, we are advertised to sail on Wednesday next—four days from to-morrow."

"I shall be ready," she answered, gratefully—adding mentally:

"Oh, Gerald! Gerald! wait for me—wait for me! Do nothing to make our meeting a horror, when it should be a perfect delight!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOMEWARD FAST AND HOME AT LAST.

"THERE is a lady in the case."

This careless newspaper phrase, I said, had pierced the heart of Gertrude like a dagger, and despite of all her efforts, the dagger rankled there and could not be withdrawn.

Her knowledge of Geraldine had taught her that the haughty beauty would descend to any devices to win the hand of Gerald Fitzgerald, even to the humiliating one of working upon his compassion.

"Gerald loves me, and will never cease to love me. Such a love as Gerald bears to me can never die. Such love will live forever, here and hereafter. Yet he may marry Geraldine all the same. Believing me to have been lost at sea, listening to the counsel of old friends, and more than all, compassionating Geraldine, he may marry her before I can reach him to prevent the horror. But it will be from pity, not from love! Yes, proud beauty, if you descend to practice on his pity, he will marry you for pity's sake, and sacrifice his life's freedom and happiness, as many a noble man has done before, for some weak or wicked woman's sake," she murmured to herself, as she tossed restlessly to and fro on her sleepless bed.

Poor child! how fast her troubles were teaching her the hardest knowledge of the world.

The next day, being the Sabbath, Gertrude accompanied the family to church, both in the morning and in the afternoon, and heard two excellent sermons from the rector.

She hoped to have seen Captain Wailes at church and even at dinner with his relatives; but she did not see him

on either occasion. The good captain of the *Becky* had the invariable habit of holding religious services on his own ship, and looking after the spiritual needs of his own men, or, at least, of such among them as could be induced to listen to his teachings, for, in this respect, he would not coerce them. And this habit he did not depart from even on this day.

On Monday morning Captain Wailes called early, and asked to see Mrs. Fleming alone. And when that merry little woman went down to welcome him, he put a handful of bank-notes in her hand, saying, confidentially :

" Now, Cousin Caroline, you have made more than one long sea voyage, and you know what a lady would require to make her comfortable during a five or six months' residence on a ship."

" Of course I do."

" Well, say nothing to Mrs. Fitzgerald, the poor child is so sensitive about incurring obligations; but do me the favour to take this money and use it in her interest. Go out and buy a big sea chest—she is my only lady passenger, and she and the stewardess will have the whole cabin to themselves, so there will be plenty of room in it for her big chest and all her effects. Fill it with everything that she can possibly need."

" Very well, I will attend to it this morning, Cousin George."

" And don't forget to put in all the newest novels and poems out, for she is a great reader."

" I will remember."

" And pencils and paints to make pictures."

" Very well."

" And be sure to get some—some—some—"

" Some *what*, George ?"

" Some of those things that you women use when you punch holes and cut scallops in strips of white stuff and sew them around."

" Oh, you mean white cambric embroidery."

" I don't know what the sphinx it is, but if you do, get it. And also something you use when you make bright fuzzy flowers and puppies and things on bits of sailcloth."

" Worsted embroidery."

"Very likely. And don't forget the stuff to knit fine bright little fish-nets."

"Oh, nonsense, Cousin George, you mean crochet work."

"Just so! Egyptian mysteries, I call it. But I know it keeps you women quiet; for when you are busy with it you never think how tedious the time is. Get her a plenty of it, and of everything else you can think of."

"I will do it; but I am wondering now how the poor lady managed to exist without these things during the last six months on the sea."

"Oh, the cabin was chock full of women and children, and she constituted herself free nurse, seamstress, governess, and maid-of-all-work to every one of them; and she wore the same brown stuff dress she has on now, during the whole time, and you notice it looks as nice now as if it were bran new. Oh, she is as neat as a Quakeress, this little lady," said the captain of the *Becky*, as he arose to go.

"And shall I have the chest sent to the ship."

"Of course, as soon as it is packed. Good-morning."

When the captain had left the house, Mrs. Fleming got ready and went out on her mission, and spent the whole of the forenoon in making her purchases.

She returned in time to preside at her luncheon table, and in reply to the rector's questions merely answered that she had been shopping.

During that afternoon, a large chest, with compartments, arrived, and was followed by packages of all sizes, shapes, and qualities, that poured in at the parsonage door all the evening. These were all placed in an empty bedroom, and there Mrs. Fleming and her three daughters shut themselves in for the couple of hours it took them to pack the great chest. The rector himself was called in to write the direction and then sworn to secrecy. Early the next morning the great chest was sent down on board the *Becky*, Gertrude up to that time knew nothing about it.

On Tuesday evening, Captain Wailes and Sallust Rowley came to spend their last evening with Doctor and Mrs. Fleming.

Gertrude, putting aside her deep trouble, played and

sang some of her very best pieces for the circle. Afterwards, Sallust Rowley entertained them with some of his finest recitations both in tragedy and comedy.

There was a late and sumptuous supper in honour of the occasion, and after supper quiet conversation until the hour for retirement arrived.

Then the captain of the *Becky* and Mr. Sallust Rowley united with the household in their evening worship, in which special prayers were offered up for those about to go to sea.

Finally, Captain Wailes, having received the promise of the rector to bring his guest and passenger on the ship early in the morning, took a hearty leave of the family, and, accompanied by Mr. Rowley, left the house.

Immediately after the departure of the visitors, the family retired to rest.

They arose next morning to an extra early breakfast, and then Gertrude, accompanied by the rector, his wife, and their three daughters, went down to the *Becky*, where Captain Wailes and his officers, all in their semi-naval uniform, received them on deck with the heartiest welcome.

They found the *Becky* thoroughly renovated, and in the trimmest order, and all the sailors in their holiday clothes, and every masthead gaily flying the national Stars and Stripes.

Mrs. Fleming cast a glance around, exclaiming:

"Ah! but I *am* so glad to tread the boards of the dear old *Becky* again! I have not seen the staunch old ship—for indeed she has not been to the port—since I first came out in her, with my husband and children, five years ago. How do you do, Mr. Burroughs? You don't grow a bit old!"

"I grow younger in your presence, madam," answered the gallant first mate.

"Ah, yes, that is quite likely!" laughed the lady. "How are *you*, Mr. Estep? Not married yet?"

"No, ma'am. Waiting for one of your young ladies to grow up," replied the second mate.

"Not you! You know I wouldn't give one of my girls to a seafaring man; no, not even if he were an admiral, with a private fortune of a hundred thousand a year! I

don't want either of my daughters to be a widow half her married life!"

"I'd resign and stay at home," said Estep.

"Stay where you are. It is the best place for you," retorted the lady.

The young mate laughed good-humouredly.

"Come, my dear," said Mrs. Fleming to Gertrude, "let us leave the gentlemen here and go down into the cabin. I wish to see my old quarters. Pete and I and the children had it all to ourselves when we came out here. There were no other passengers. Come, girls. You remember the old cabin, don't you, though Rebecca was only seven years old when we came out?"

The three daughters clamorously assured their mamma that they remembered the old ship, and the cabin and the mates and the stewardess and the cow and—

"There, stop your din! And be careful now coming down this companion way, or you will pitch head-foremost to the bottom of the stairs! Here we are!" exclaimed the rector's wife.

"How clean and comfortable it looks!" said Gertrude, glancing around.

"Yes, George has had it thoroughly cleansed, and I am sure it must have wanted it, after having been hospital and nursery for a score of women and children for six months," observed the rector's lady.

Gertrude's eyes fell upon the big chest, stowed at one end of the cabin. She looked more closely upon it and read her own name.

"Why, what is this?" she inquired of no one in particular.

"It's your kit, my dear."

"But I mean this big chest."

"So do I."

"Is it for me?"

"Yes, it is your outfit for the voyage. Cousin George had it sent in."

"Oh, how kind, how very kind of Captain Wailes!"

"Fiddle-de-dee, my dear; he doesn't hurt himself," laughed the lady.

Grateful tears filled Gertrude's eyes.

"Oh, surely no one ever had such friends as I have! How will I—how will Gerald ever be able to repay

them?" she thought, as she remembered all the kindness that had been shown her.

"Now show me which is your stateroom, my love, and then I will point out those that were occupied by me and my party," said Mrs. Fleming.

"This on the right as you come down to the foot of the stairs," said Gertrude. "The opposite one is occupied by the stewardess," she added.

"Exactly; though, as there will be no other passenger but yourself here, you can be queen of the cabin and sleep where you please."

"I think I shall be contented with this one."

"Well, maybe, it is the most comfortable one in the cabin, I think. Pete and I occupied it when we were coming over. The two elder girls had the next one to us, and the younger girl, with the nurse, had the next to that. The stewardess had the opposite one—the same as, it seems, that she has got now. We had a delightful time after we got over the sea-sickness."

"The cabin will feel less lonely and more interesting after what you have told me," said Gertrude, smiling.

"What on earth are they doing on deck?" exclaimed the lady, as a loud uproar of many sounds and many voices suddenly assailed their ears.

"They are hoisting sails and getting up the anchor, I think," explained Gertrude.

"Why, to be sure, I ought to have known. But what a little sailor you are getting to be! Well, come on, my dear, we had better go on deck. Come, children, we must prepare to go on shore, if we don't want to go to sea," said the chatty little woman, as she turned and went up the companion way, followed by the others.

When they reached the deck they found the usual noise and seeming confusion attending the clearing of a large merchantman.

Captain Wailes was on the quarter-deck, Mr. Burroughs fore, and Mr. Estep aft.

Dr. Fleming hastened to meet them.

"I was just coming down after you. We must go on shore now," he hastily said.

"The hour has come. 'The best of friends must part,'" exclaimed Mrs. Fleming, in a serio-comic tone.

The captain sprang down from the poop and came towards them.

"We shall offer prayers for your safety every night and morning, my dear. And on next Sunday the congregation will pray for you," said the rector, kindly.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, little woman. The staunch old *Becky* will be sure to carry you safe home. She never cuts capers, and won't take any nonsense either from wind or wave!" said Mrs. Fleming, as she heartily shook Gertrude's hands, and kissed her cheek.

"I will never, never forget all your goodness to me," replied Gertrude, in a voice broken by emotion.

The three young girls next kissed her good-by.

Then the whole party bade farewell to the captain of the *Becky* and his officers, and lastly to Sallust Rowley, who came running from some part of the ship to receive their adieux.

Finally they went ashore.

In ten minutes afterwards, the glorious old *Becky*, with all her canvas spread, and all her colours flying, stood out to sea.

Gertrude remained on deck, as long as the land was in sight, watching, first her group of friends that stood upon the pier waving handkerchiefs, in response to which she constantly waved hers, and when they could no longer be seen, watching the distant spires of the city until they sank beneath the horizon, and nothing but sea and sky remained to be seen.

Then Captain Wailes came up to her with words of cheer.

"Well, my dear, the *Becky* is flying over the sea this morning, is she not? But, then, wind and tide are both in her favour, and I hope they will continue to be so as long as possible. And how are you this morning, my child? I have hardly had time to ask you."

"Above all things I am grateful, Captain Wailes. I have seen your last munificent donation in the cabin."

"Only a sea-kit, my child — a few indispensables to make you less uncomfortable."

"Oh, Captain Wailes, how shall I thank you?"

"Nonsense, my good little lady! Don't mention it. It is not worth talking about — Burroughs!" and thus

hailing his first mate as an excuse for leaving, the worthy captain hurried off to avoid her thanks.

Is it necessary to describe this long voyage also? I think not. To do so would only weary my readers.

"To sum up briefly. The *Becky* sailed from San Francisco on the first of September, and made a very swift and pleasant voyage down the Pacific coast.

Gertrude was, as we have said, the sole passenger in the cabin, with no companion but the old coloured stewardess.

She found the old woman a very interesting attendant, having a memory stored with the legends and traditions of her native State, from its earliest settlement to the present time; and with stories of adventure by land and sea, in which she herself had taken part. She had also a treasury of songs and hymns, whose weird, unearthly words and music possessed a strange fascination for Gertrude.

With the truest delicacy, Captain Wailes absented himself entirely from the after-cabin, thus setting an example that Sallust Rowley felt compelled to follow whether he liked it or not.

Gertrude was inexpressibly grateful for the refined forethought that left this place perfectly sacred to herself and her coloured attendant.

But though no one ever intruded on her presence, yet she made no selfish or suspicious recluse of herself.

She met her companions three times each day, at breakfast, dinner and supper, in the saloon, and she made herself agreeable to them as courtesy and gratitude required.

Besides this, on fine days she spent much of her time on deck with some little piece of needle-work in her hand, or a book, that she was ever ready to lay aside at the approach of any fellow-voyager who might wish to converse with her.

In the evening, either on deck, when the weather proved fine, or in the saloon, when it was otherwise, she was always ready to talk, sing, or play, as Sallust was to read or recite for the entertainment of their captain and his mates.

Such was Gertrude's outer life on the *Becky*.

But her inner life?

Ah! that constantly revolved about one centre—her love for her absent husband.

That unlucky phrase, "A woman in the case," still rankled like a pointed dagger in her bosom, nor could she draw it out! It caused a raging fever of impatience at her own enforced absence from him, to burn through her veins, consuming her strength.

That this did not utterly destroy her young life, was due to her absolute faith in her husband's undying love, and to her realisation of the fact that every hour brought her nearer and nearer to him.

Every night she counted off one day from the days of absence. Every Wednesday night, dating from the day of sailing, she counted off one week.

On the first of October, she counted off one month gone!

They had run down the Pacific coast at an unusual degree of speed, for the "slow and sure" old *Becky*, but then they had been favoured with unusually fine weather.

They were nearing Cape Horn, beginning to feel the heavy seas in the great shock of the meeting oceans.

Their experience in doubling the Cape on their homeward, was quite as bad as that of their outward bound voyage. Storms that seemed to threaten the instantaneous destruction of the *Becky;* winds that would have reft to ribbons any bit of sail exposed to their fury; waves that tossed the ship mountains high one moment, only to swallow it in deep gulfs of darkness the next, and cast it up again half swamped!

They had ten days of this diabolical warfare with wind and wave, during which Gertrude was confined to her stateroom with illness, and carefully attended by the stewardess, who, having spent thirty years of her half century on sea, was proof against sea-sickness under all circumstances.

The captain of the *Becky* declared that the old ship could weather it, and the old ship *did* weather it.

By the 1st of November the *Becky* was in comparatively smooth water again, and Gertrude recovered, and scored two months gone from the long sea voyage.

On the first day that she reappeared on deck she was welcomed with joy by the captain, the mates, the old sailors, and Sallust Rowley.

"How long now, Captain Wailes? How long?" she inquired, deprecatingly.

"Until we reach port? My dear, in three months from this date, namely, on or before the first of February, the *Becky* will be anchored in Baltimore harbour."

"Then our voyage is nearly half over!" exclaimed Gertrude, with animation.

"Yes, my dear, it is already two-fifths over. How glad you will be to be quit of old George Wailes and the *Becky!*"

"Oh, no, no! I shall never, never forget Captain Wailes and the *Becky!* I shall always echo the sailors' prayer—'God bless Captain Wailes and the *Becky!*' And I will never consent for you to drop our acquaintance. You must visit us at the Summit in Wilde county, and we must visit you at your home in St. Mary's. And some time or other, Captain Wailes, I hope Colonel Fitzgerald and myself will take a voyage with you in the *Becky*. Oh! pray, *never* say again that I shall be glad to get rid of you and the *Becky*, because it is not true. I shall only be glad to get home and only too sorry to leave you and the old ship," said Gertrude, with emotion.

"I will never say it again, my child, for I *know* it is not true!" answered Captain Wailes, heartily.

The remainder of the voyage seemed the happiest, and therefore the shortest to Gertrude.

On the first of December, she scored another month off the length of her banishment.

At Christmas the captain celebrated the great religious holiday by holding divine service in the main cabin during the forenoon, and giving a feast to his passengers and officers, and a treat to his men, in the afternoon. In the evening, Sallust gave recitations and readings, and Gertrude distributed Christmas gifts of embroidered slippers and smoking-caps that she had been at work upon during the voyage, to the captain, the mates, and Sallust Rowley. These the recipients took with pride and pleasure, and vowed to keep them to the last day of their lives, and only to wear them on grand holidays.

One week later, on the 1st of January, Gertrude wished all her fellow-voyagers a happy New Year, with more real joy than is usually felt on such occasions; for on that morning she had scored off the fourth month of her

long homeward-bound voyage, and the eleventh month of her protracted separation from her husband.

"One month more," she said to herself, "will complete the year of unexpected absence. Oh! if when we left Calais together on the *Messenger*, on that fatal 1st of February, it had been foretold me that within a few hours Gerald and myself would be suddenly and violently sundered, not to meet again, or communicate even by message or letter again for twelve months, no, I would not have believed it, though an angel of light had been the prophet! But in one little month, Gerald, we will meet. Oh! we will meet as loved ones, severed by death, meet in heaven—unless—oh! Gerald; Gerald! do nothing to change this meeting of joy and blessedness into one of horror and grief! Oh! Gerald, that my spirit had strength to pierce through time and space and whisper to your heart, 'Keep free, oh! Gerald, for I am coming to you!'"

At such moments, when anxiety was wrought to a pitch of excitement scarcely to be endured, her one refuge was prayer.

Gertrude prayed and was strengthened.

A little later, on the same morning, when she was sitting alone on the forward deck, with her gaze fixed upon the northwestern horizon, beyond which lay her far distant home, Captain Wailes joined her. She welcomed him with a smile.

"Only one month more, dear Captain Wailes. Only one short month more, and we shall all be at home, and everybody will meet their friends, and I shall meet my husband, and you your two dear Rebeccas!" she exclaimed.

"My little lass and her mother! Yes, my child, in one month, or less time, we shall drop anchor in Baltimore harbour," responded the captain of the *Becky*.

The last month of the voyage passed quickly, until about the twenty-fifth of January, when, on entering Chesapeake Bay, the ship was assailed by foul weather, beaten back by head winds, and then afterwards detained by heavy fogs, until on a Sunday afternoon, the first of February, when it neared the mouth of the Patapsco river.

Gertrude mentally struck off the last month from her

terrible year of absence, as she sat down on the foredeck and looked up the river. But her dark eyes were sorrowful and heavy with unshed tears. For she was thinking that this was the anniversary of the loss of the *Messenger*, and feeling how terrible the day must be to her absent husband, who believed that she had perished in that disaster; and she was leaning over him in spirit, weeping over him, and whispering, "Oh, Gerald, do not grieve so bitterly! I am near you, I am with you, and I will soon stand visibly before you."

Here Mr. Sallust Rowley found her, and joyously accosted her:

"Well, Cousin Gertrude, we are in sight of port. You may see the spires of Baltimore glancing in the beams of the setting sun. Take this spy-glass!—Eh! What! Weeping! What the mischief is the matter now?" he anxiously inquired, as she turned her tearful face towards him.

"Oh, Cousin Sallust," she said, smiling through her tears, "you know this is the anniversary of my death. I was lost at sea in the burning of the *Messenger*, twelve months ago to-day."

"What *ever* do you mean? I thought this was the anniversary of your rescue from death!" exclaimed the boy, in a perplexed and aggrieved tone.

"So it is; and Colonel Fitzgerald will soon prove how grateful he can be to the brave hand that saved me. But I have been dead for a year all the same."

"Now, what the blue dees do you mean? Here you are, all alive and well, and you say you have been dead for a year!"

"I have been dead to my husband, Sallust! I have been dead for a year to-day. This is the anniversary of my death, and oh! I can feel how bitter, how grievous this day must be to him. And I must grieve with him, until I can come to life in his presence and rejoice with him!"

"I understand; yes, I suppose Gerald does feel low to-day. I should think he would. But if he only knew how fast you are coming towards him!"

It was on a clear, starlight, Sunday night that the *Becky* anchored in Baltimore harbour.

The evening bells were ringing the people into church, and to Gertrude's sensitive mind they seemed to be also ringing their own welcome home. As no business could be done until morning, Captain Wailes invited Gertrude and Sallust to go on shore with him to church.

They both willingly consented.

Gertrude exchanged her water-proof sea-suit for a black silk walking-dress and a sealskin jacket and hat, that made her look like a pretty, fanciful little Arctic traveller; and Sallust made a dandy of himself for the occasion, and even Captain Wailes put on his best holiday suit, and they went on shore, leaving the ship to the care of the two mates and the crew.

Once on land the little party divided, Sallust going to attend Vespers at the nearest Catholic church, and Captain Wailes and Gertrude, to the evening service at the Episcopal church.

Once more to tread dry land, to walk the streets of a populous city, to enter a well-filled place of worship, seemed to our little friend like coming back to earth from death.

She appreciated the privilege of united worship as she had never done before. She entered into the services with a depth of earnestness never before experienced, even by her most earnest soul. She listened to the sermon with a profound interest that only the circumstances could have inspired, for in truth, the discourse was scarcely equal to any of those selected from the finest writings of the most gifted theologians, and read by the captain of the *Becky*, when he conducted the services on his ship at sea.

After the benediction, Gertrude took the old seaman's offered arm, and left the church, cheered, comforted, and strengthened.

They met Sallust Rowley by appointment at the wharf, where he had been waiting for them for a few minutes, and the three returned together to the ship.

Gertrude bid the two gentlemen good-night on the deck, and retired to her cabin, too restless and excited to sleep.

"Now for Washington, by the first train to-morrow morning!" she said; "and then for West Virginia, by the first stage; and then my meeting with Gerald!—that

meeting which is to be like the meeting of loved ones in heaven—unless!—"

Her sentence was not completed, even in thought, it was merged in prayer.

But we must precede Gertrude to her mountain home, and see what her reception there is like to be.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE LADY IN THE CASE."

YES, there was "a lady in the case," as my readers already know; but how deeply she had dived down into the case they have yet to learn.

Geraldine had secretly sworn to win Gerald for her husband, cost what it might in truth, honour, or honesty.

Her creed was that everything had its price, and her policy was to pay the price and take it.

She had begun by casting to the winds every scruple of conscience.

In the first place she had recklessly lied to Gerald. (There is really no other term so fit as the strong old Saxon word to express the act in all its ugliness.) She had lied to Gerald when she told him that Gertrude had perished from a chance blow of the plank that had crushed in her skull at the moment it struck her from her husband's hold, and that she had not sunk from his mad abandonment of her.

It had cost Miss Fitzgerald much mental pain and shame to tell this falsehood; for, after all, she was one of the "high Fitzgeralds," and there is something in a hereditary sense of honour, but she had resolved to hold back nothing of the price she intended to pay for Colonel Fitzgerald's hand, and she paid down her truth as the first instalment.

After that she studied her part carefully, and acted it well. She sealed up his mind's eyes, and put him off his

guard by seeming neither to seek nor to avoid his society, and by seeming *never* to wish to recall the past, and yet through all to let him discover that she secretly, though hopelessly, loved him still. She knew this would touch the noble and generous soul of Fitzgerald as nothing else on her part could.

But when Gerald, in his despair, procured himself to be reinstated in the army, and placed in command of a regiment ordered to California, she saw that she must modify her tactics; she must keep him near her if she was ultimately to win him. Here was another heavy price in pride to be paid down. She had ardent admirers in high positions at the national capital. She went secretly to Washington, and by dint of fascination, flattery, *bribery*, she succeeded in getting Colonel Fitzgerald's orders changed, and his regiment sent to Wendover, West Virginia, instead of to San Francisco, California.

And Gerald Fitzgerald never knew, or even suspected, the reason for his change of orders.

Miss Fitzgerald's aiders and abettors kept her counsel most "honourably," as she kept theirs.

It was in fact a financial transaction that would scarcely bear the light.

Geraldine returned home, and soon learned through the newspapers, that Colonel Fitzgerald had proceeded to his new post, within thirty miles of her own home.

But though within such easy distance, he never came to visit her.

She knew that Gerald believed she still loved him secretly, and that he was touched by that belief—*touched*, but not *moved*. It was necessary now to lead him to believe that she was secretly dying for him! This, she knew, would, sooner or later, bring him to her feet.

But to effect this, she would have to pay down a heavy price in health and a heavier one in pride.

But she did not hesitate! Had she not said that she would bring Gerald Fitzgerald to her feet, let the cost be what it might, even her soul?

She did not hesitate.

HER WILL WAS IRON.

While dwelling in the seclusion of her Mountain Manor House, with only sentimental romance-reading Miss Sue Greenleaf for a companion, she secretly began to practice

on her own health, until, under her system of very low diet, in which acids entered largely, and by the daily use, in quantities that were not fatal, of an emaciating medicine, she so reduced her condition that her colour faded from her face, and her flesh wasted from her form. While this was going on, her friends were growing painfully anxious, as she intended that they should.

The Greenwood family came often to see her, begged her to see a physician, but she refused, saying that no physician could do her any good; and she further declared that if any one presumed to send a doctor to her against her express orders, that she would neither see nor speak to him.

Miss Sue and Mrs. Doy were greatly troubled, and honest Roy was at his wits' ends.

What was the matter with her?

No one could tell!

Mrs. Doy said that any one might see that she was going into a consumption.

Mr. Roy objected that she had no cough at all, and no fever.

Miss Sue shook her head mysteriously, and hinted that there were maladies of the mind much harder to cure than those of the body. She had her own theory of the invalid's illness; and being mentally, "a leaky vessel," she soon let it ooze out that their Geraldine was dying of a broken heart from disappointed affection, and that if something were not done, she would certainly die entirely dead, and then it would be too late, and so forth.

When this idea got through the thick skull of Royal Greenleaf, he, being the most practical person in the sentimental family, began at once "to do something." And he did it with more tact than anyone would have believed him capable of exercising.

He went on a friendly visit to Colonel Fitzgerald, as we have seen, and in the course of that visit he was naturally led to speak of Miss Fitzgerald, and her failing health and spirits; but never betrayed that he or any one else suspected that Geraldine was pining of unrequited love.

"He'll find that out fast enough for himself," reflected sagacious Mr. Greenleaf. And he was half right.

The next day when he was taking leave, he drew a

promise from Gerald to spend the Christmas holidays at Greenwood, but he never mentioned the intended visit of Geraldine, who was at that time still at her Mountain Manor House.

We have seen how the news of Geraldine's declining health troubled Gerald, who believed, as others did, that a morbid affection for himself was preying on her spirits.

Royal Greenleaf never let the subject entirely drop, but in every letter to Gerald Fitzgerald he spoke, as we have seen, of Geraldine's fast failing health, telling him towards the last, that Geraldine was dying of some obscure, incurable malady of mind or body. And all this affected Gerald Fitzgerald as it was meant to do.

Miss Sue and Mrs. Doy, acting in concert with their brother towards the one end of bringing Gerald and Geraldine together, planned the visit of Miss Fitzgerald to Greenwood to spend the Christmas holidays. They never hinted to Geraldine that Gerald would visit them at that season. Nevertheless, Geraldine knew exactly all that they were doing. Had she not planned for it all? The Greenleafs were only the blind instruments of Miss Fitzgerald's unscrupulous will.

We have seen how the pair met at Greenwood; how shocked and grieved Gerald was to find Geraldine so fearfully changed—so fragile, so delicate, so transparently pale; dying, yet so beautiful in death; and withal—and this was her greatest charm for him—so meek, so gentle, so resigned—a lovely martyr to unrequited love!

As I asked before—what could a gentleman do?

He did not love her. He loved only his little lost angel Gertrude; but he pitied her; he sought to comfort and cheer her. Finally he asked her to be his wife, and she accepted him, as we have seen.

Their engagement was announced to the delighted Greenleafs, and Thursday, the fifth of the ensuing February, was fixed for the wedding-day.

Gerald then took leave of his betrothed bride, and went back to his regiment, the most unhappy of men.

His proposal of marriage to Geraldine had been an act of the most perfect self-sacrifice that ever man performed.

He felt that he did not, and never could, love Geraldine as his wife.

He could so love only the little angel who had become as the soul of his soul, now lost to sight, yet not altogether lost, since even now, at times, she seemed to float down upon his bosom, a white dove, breathing of peace to the tossed and troubled spirit.

Geraldine on her part was triumphant! exultant! jubilant! She had won, she had succeeded; she had conquered! She had paid down truth, honour, health, pride, almost life; but she had got the prize!

It was not until her excitement had calmed down a little after the departure of her captive, that she recollected one little humiliating incident in her courtship, which in the delirious joy of her conquest she had forgotten. It was this—

Gerald Fitzgerald had never uttered one word of love or admiration for her, when asking her to marry him, nor one syllable of satisfaction at her consent to do so. She remembered well the occasion and the terms of his proposal. She recalled the scene now. It was the last evening of his stay at Greenwood. They were seated on the sofa of the "big parlour," where they had been purposely left alone.

After a long and thoughtful silence he said:

"Geraldine, I shall rejoin my regiment to-morrow. We were long betrothed to each other in the old times by the will of our fathers. We have had many fierce and bitter quarrels. But we are the last of our race. What do you say? Before I leave you, will you consent to bury the hatchet *forever*, and clasp hands with me? Will you be my wife?"

She answered by placing her hand in his.

He pressed that hand and raised it to his lips. It seemed rather an act of courtesy than an act of love.

That was all.

She recalled the event with humiliation and pain. She remembered, too, how she had scornfully taunted his poor little meek "first wife" with the fact that Colonel Fitzgerald had never even *pretended* to love *her!* And now—oh, degrading thought!—she was forced to admit that Gerald never affected to love herself. Clearly he would marry her only in compassion.

No matter—he would marry her! She had paid high for *that* triumph, and she would have it!

Her health improved rapidly, for she ceased her deleterious practices upon it and commenced an opposite course, which, in conjunction with the stimulus of her new happiness, soon restored her to more than her pristine brilliancy of beauty, and caused the honest old ladies at Greenwood to nod to each other, as much as to say:

"You see we were right! She was dying for him, and now that she is to have him, look at her!"

She commenced rapid preparations for her wedding, which she was determined should be celebrated on the fifth of February, in the most costly style and with grandest eclat.

And so on the very Monday, February second, when Gertrude was to start for Virginia, we find Geraldine in her elegant boudoir at the Mountain Manor House, surrounded by all the paraphernalia of her bridal pageantry, and anticipating with pride and delight her bridal day so near at hand.

And Gerald? Now that he was again betrothed to Geraldine, he resigned himself to the prospect of his marriage to her as to a duty. He corresponded with her punctually; but his letters expressed no more than he felt —simply the compassion that veiled itself in delicate, brotherly affection.

He never went back to Greenwood or to the Mountain Manor House to visit her. He wrote an explanation, that he could not properly ask for leave of absence so soon; or, indeed, before the first of February, when he should apply for a short furlough to go upon their marriage tour.

On the first of February, Gerald Fitzgerald shut himself up in his room at his headquarters, and remained there through all that dark and terrible day—a day that he said to himself must ever be accursed in his memory, since it had snatched from him his Gertrude by a sudden and horrible disaster, and had left in her place an incurable sorrow darkened by remorse.

But even then in his deepest gloom and heaviness, as often before, his dove seemed to flutter down upon his bosom and whisper peace.

His wedding-day with Geraldine was fast approaching. But—so was Gertrude! So was his saving angel!

CHAPTER XV.

GERTRUDE'S ARRIVAL AT HOME.

ON Monday morning Gertrude was up with the sun. It was a fine, bright, frosty morning, and a fresh light wind from the west, blowing over thousands of miles of land, made the air seem peculiarly sweet and elastic after so many months of salt sea breezes.

Gertrude's trunk had been packed for many days before, in anticipation of this landing.

All she had to do now was to gather her few outlying effects, and put them into the top cavity of the same trunk, secure it, and then pack a small hand-bag for her journey.

So eager was she to be off that she came to the breakfast table already equipped for her journey in sealskin jacket, cap, and collar.

The captain of the *Becky*, standing at the head of the table, received her with an amused smile.

"Why, my child, there is time enough for that. The train does not start for Washington these two hours," he said, as he set for her a chair.

"Oh, but Captain Wailes, I feel so much nearer going, now I have my travelling suit on," she said with a smile, as she took her seat.

"But, my dear lady, you need not really go till the afternoon train; for you know that the coach by which you must travel does not leave until evening. You would only have to wait in Washington."

"Oh, but dear Captain Wailes, you must understand, I shall feel so much nearer home, when I have gone *one* stage on my journey!" she pleaded.

Sallust Rowley and the two mates then joined them, and breakfast began.

Sallust had his own comments to make on Gertrude's haste to be off; but they received the same reply that had been given to Captain Wailes.

"I wonder," thought the young man, "who is going to be overjoyed at my resurrection. I suppose my sister Horatia, and my little cousin Patricia! And not another living soul! I wonder who is dead and who married, since I last heard of them? Nobody, probably. Years pass without anything happening while we are at home; but if we happen to be away, even for a few weeks, we think that everything is going to happen! Bosh! nothing does!"

And with this conclusion, Mr. Rowley gave his mind to his beefsteak, new laid eggs, fresh butter, and other land luxuries that the steward had brought from the Fells' Point Market that very morning.

After breakfast Mr. Rowley proceeded very leisurely to put up his belongings, and make himself ready to attend Gertrude.

The captain of the *Becky* also packed a valise.

Gertrude walked restlessly up and down the deck until they joined her there.

"I have sent a man on shore to bring a carriage for you, Mrs. Fitzgerald, and a van for your trunk."

"Thanks, Captain Wailes. But now that the hour has come, I feel very sorry to part from you and the *Becky*, even in the very midst of my joy at the thought of going home," replied Gertrude, as tears softened her dark eyes.

"I know you do, my dear young lady; but the parting hour has not come yet. I am ready to go to Washington with you. I shall not leave you until I see you safe aboard the stage-coach. Then I shall take the evening boat and run down to Old St. Mary's County and see the old lady and the little girl," replied the captain.

"Oh, that is delightful! But—the *Becky?*" inquired Gertrude.

"You are very much concerned about the *Becky!* I am jealous of the *Becky!* But the *Becky* will be all right in the care of Estep and Burroughs, who are both bachelors, with no particular inducement to leave for home in a hurry."

"Captain Wailes, this is another instance of your

kindness to me. Colonel Fitzgerald can never be too grateful to you."

"Nonsense, my child. I do for you what, no doubt, he would do for my wife or daughter if our circumstances were reversed."

They talked much longer in this friendly strain—the old seaman renewing his promise to run up to Wilde County and visit the Fitzgeralds before he should go on another long voyage; and Gertrude reiterating her hope that Colonel Fitzgerald and herself might some time take a sea trip with Captain Wailes on the *Becky*.

They talked until interrupted by the return of the messenger, who reported the carriage and the van waiting on the wharf. The baggage was then carried on shore, and put in the van.

While this was being done, Gertrude went around the ship, and shook hands with every sailor, with the steward, and the cook, and every man on board, and with the stewardess in the cabin, to whom she had made many parting gifts from her well-stocked sea-trunk, and, last of all, like the tender child that she was, she went to bid good-by to the ship's cow, who had given milk for her tea and coffee during the long voyage.

"How I wish I could take you home with me to the green pastures of Virginia, poor Molly," she said, stroking the kindly, stupid face. "And now, I hope, for your sake, that there may be some future life of compensation for such as you. AND I BELIEVE THERE IS!" she exclaimed, suddenly and emphatically.

"Come, Cousin Gertrude! Come, we are waiting for you," called the voice of Sallust Rowley.

She hastily put a little apple in the mouth of poor Molly, and ran to the gang-plank, where her friends were standing.

"You don't mean to tell me you were kissing the cow!" said Sallust, mockingly.

"No; but I don't think the old woman who is said to have done so was such a fool as she is represented to have been, after all," answered Gertrude, between tears and smiles.

She then shook hands with Mr. Burroughs and Mr. Estep, and cordially invited them to visit herself and Colonel Fitzgerald at their Virginia home.

Finally she took the offered arm of Captain Wailes and went on shore to the carriage. Sallust Rowley followed.

A rapid drive of forty minutes brought them to the railway depot, where they found good seats in the "ladies car." Five minutes later they were rushing on to Washington at "railway speed."

After her long sea-voyage, Gertrude keenly enjoyed her two hours' ride through the undulating and well-wooded country lying between Baltimore and Washington.

It was yet early in the forenoon when the train ran into the Washington terminus.

"Now, where would you like to go, Mrs. Fitzgerald? You have eight hours to wait in this city, you know," said Captain Wailes, as he handed Gertrude from the car to the platform, followed by Mr. Rowley with the travelling-bags.

"Oh, to Fuller's. The stage coaches for West Virginia start from there, you know," answered the lady.

The captain led her out on the sidewalk, still followed by Sallust with the light luggage, and beckoned a hackman, who immediately drove up.

The party entered the hack, Captain Wailes gave the order, and they were driven down to Pensylvania avenue and up to Fuller's.

Captain Wailes conducted Gertrude into the house and up to the ladies' parlour, while Sallust paid and discharged the hack.

He engaged a room for Mrs. Fitzgerald, and another for himself and Mr. Rowley.

Gertrude was about to retire to her own room, when the old seaman stopped her to inquire:

"Shall I order a private sitting-room and luncheon for our party, or will you go to the public table?"

"No private sitting-room, if you please, Captain Wailes. We will lunch at the public table," answered Gertrude, with her foot just poised for flight to her own apartment.

"A moment longer, my dear young lady. The public lunch will be ready from twelve to three. We are not the least tired from our ride on the train. We have eight hours to wait here, as I said. It will be tedious to you. Now suppose, as we breakfasted at seven, that we take

an early lunch say at twelve, and then get a carriage and go for a long ride, to return to the six o'clock dinner, after which, at seven o'clock, you will take your seat in the stage-coach for West Virginia, and I shall go down and take the nine o'clock boat for Leonardtown and Old St. Mary's. Come! what do you say to my programme for killing time."

"Only what you have given me occasion to say a thousand times before—that you are too kind to me, Captain Wailes."

"Then you consent to the arrangement? That is right," exclaimed the captain, heartily.

"Forgive me—*no!* With many thanks, dear Captain Wailes, I must decline this pleasant drive. I—I must remain here, until I enter the stage-coach to go home," said Gertrude, gently but rigidly adhering to the rule she had made for herself never to go anywhere in the company of her escorts, except when she was actually obliged by stress of circumstances to do so, as in her sea-voyage and land journey.

The old captain partly understood and approved her.

"Little prude," he said to himself; "little prude, to refuse to ride out with an old sea-dog like myself, who might be her grandfather, and an honest young pup, like Rowley, with whom I would trust my own daughter around the world if necessary! Well, she is right, after all. Prudery is the path of safety, especially to a lovely young married woman away from her husband."

Then he answered aloud: "Very well, my child; please yourself and you will please me."

"But, Captain Wailes, you and Mr. Rowley should go for that drive," said Gertrude.

"Well, perhaps so, my dear; we will see about it after luncheon," said the old seaman.

At this moment Sallust Rowley entered the parlour and Gertrude escaped, and called a waitress to show her to her own room.

By the merest chance it happened to be the one she had occupied with Colonel Fitzgerald when he first brought her to Washington as his bride, three years before. But the furniture, which was quite fresh then, had never been renewed, and it was toned down, if not faded, by use.

Gertrude looked around upon the familiar chamber, and then her eyes rested on the door communicating with the sitting-room that had been hers. It was closed fast now.

"There used to be a parlour in connection with this chamber," she said.

"Yes, Miss," answered the waitress, who very naturally supposed this childlike young creature to be the daughter of her elder escort, and the sister of her younger one. "Oh, yes, Miss, but as I explained to your pa and your brother, this is the height of the season, and the house is quite full, and we had to turn that parlour into a bedroom. Anything else, Miss?"

"No, thank you," answered Gertrude, who did not like the mistake made by the waitress, yet did not see her way clear to correcting it without entering into long explanations. But seeing the woman about to leave the room, she felt that she could not even silently be a party to her self-deception. So she called her back and said:

"You are in error. Those gentlemen are no kin to me. I am only related to the younger one by marriage."

"Oh! yes, Miss, I see."

"My name is Fitzgerald—*Mrs.* Fitzgerald."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, ma'am, I am sure. I meant no offence," said the girl, who had not self-control enough to prevent her from opening wide her eyes at this childlike matron.

"No offence has been taken. I only wished to set you right. There, that will do, thank you," said Gertrude, gently.

The girl retired and left her alone.

Gertrude took off her upper dress, and lay down on the bed—not that she was tired, but she remembered she would have to sit up in the stage coach for three nights and two days, and so she lay down as a matter of prudent foresight. She did not sleep, but she lay and wished for something to read, to help to ease her thoughts of their incessant labour of the possible or probable circumstances attending her approaching meeting with her husband.

"Brood as I may, I cannot *now* alter events by one hairsbreadth. I can do nothing but go straight to Gerald as fast as the means of travel will let me. But I wish I

could think of something else, if it were only to save me from monomania," she said to herself.

As if in answer to her thoughts there came a rap at the door.

Gertrude arose, and standing well under shelter behind it, opened it cautiously.

"Here's some books and papers, Miss, the old gentleman sent you—I beg your pardon, *ma'am*, I meant," said the voice of the unseen waitress.

"Oh, it is you! Come in," said Gertrude, as she opened wide the door.

The girl entered, and laid a large parcel of magazines and newspapers down on the table, and then went out.

Gertrude, who had not seen a magazine for the last five months, eagerly seized them and selected one to read while she rested.

At one o'clock, the waitress brought her a message from Captain Wailes, inviting her down to luncheon.

She hastily dressed, and went down to the dining-room, where she was soon joined by her two escorts.

While at the table, Sallust said to her:

"Cousin Gertrude, I had better book our places in the night's coach. I suppose you wish to travel day and night, and go directly on to Wildeville?"

"I wish to travel day and night until we reach Blackville; there I must change coaches, and go on to Wendover, where Colonel Fitzgerald's regiment is quartered," answered the little lady.

"Oh, ay, to be sure! I never thought of that! Then I shall book two places for Blackville," said Sallust, promptly.

"No, Mr. Rowley. You must book my place for Blackville and your own for Wildeville. There is really no farther necessity, dear cousin, why you should go out of your way for me. You may see me safe on the Blackville coach, and my husband will receive me safe at Wendover," said Gertrude sweetly, but decidedly.

"Well, now, I be blessed if I like that! I really think I have got a right to see you safe into Fitzgerald's quarters, and with my hands to place you under Fitzgerald's care," said Sallust, with the boyish petulance he sometimes betrayed.

"Mr. Rowley, you have hitherto been a loyal knight to

this lady. Be so still! And obey her wishes," said the old captain, gravely.

"What! and leave her to go through the wildest part of the country unprotected?" demanded Sallust.

"She can protect herself. You will see her into the stage-coach at Blackville, and her husband will receive her at Wendover."

"Dear Sallust, that will be best," said Gertrude.

"Oh, well, Mrs. Fitzgerald, if you are tired of my company, I won't force myself on yours, I am sure," said Sallust. Then, seeing Gertrude's grieved look, he hastened to retract his implied reproach by adding: "But I won't say that, like the ill-tempered dog that I am! You know best, Cousin Gertrude, and I should submit, though I am so disappointed. I did so want to see your meeting with Gerald, *and his looks!*"

"Such a meeting should not be a spectacle, dear Sallust," said Gertrude, gently. "Afterwards, dear cousin, when I have told my husband to whose courage and devotion I owe my life, he will send for you and receive you according to your merits."

"Oomhe hoo! Like a king graciously accords audience to some poor wretch who has been battered to death in his royal service. But there! I won't say that either! I'm a petulant cur this afternoon, Cousin Gertrude, and not fit to talk to any one," said Sallust, rising from the table.

"You are one of the bravest and truest gentlemen that ever lived, and I and all who know you honour you as such," said Gertrude, as she and Captain Wailes followed his example and arose from their seats.

Gertrude retired to her room to lie down and rest until the hour approached for the commencement of her long and fatiguing journey.

A few minutes before six o'clock she arose and made her simple toilet, and went down to dinner, where she was joined by Captain Wailes and Sallust Rowley.

"'When shall we three meet again!
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?'"

said Captain Wailes in a serio-comic tone, as he handed his young protegé to her seat at the little table set apart for them.

"'In summer sunshine on the main,
There shall we three meet again!'"

responded Gertrude, with a smile, adding: "You know you promised to take us for a sea trip, Captain Wailes!"

"Well answered, little lady! Come, sit down, and let this last dinner that we shall take together, for some time, at least, be a happy one."

The dinner was a happy, if not a merry one. At its conclusion, Gertrude had barely time to put on her sack and hat, and return her comb and brushes to her hand-bag, when she was called to take her seat in the stage-coach.

The short February afternoon had closed in. It was now seven o'clock, and a clear, starlight night.

Gertrude came downstairs, and Captain Wailes took her out to the coach and placed her comfortably in the back seat, and then, leaning in at the window, took a last affectionate leave of the little angel he had so long succoured, and not "unawares."

Then he retreated, and Sallust entered and seated himself at the other corner of the same back seat. Half a dozen other passengers got in. They were all men and all strangers to both Sallust and Gertrude.

From their conversation they seemed to be country merchants on their way home from northern cities, where they had been to purchase goods.

When they were seated in their places the stagecoach started on its long night journey westward.

They crossed the Potomac by the Long Bridge, and took the turnpike road through the forest of Fairfax county.

Soon one after another of the men dropped asleep, and some snored.

Sallust slept without dreaming.

Gertrude dreamed without sleeping, and all her dreams were of her coming meeting with Gerald. She wondered whether he had got the letter she had dispatched by the pony express from California. Her reason told her that there were many chances against his having received it. But in any case, she reflected, it did not matter much now. In three days she would be at Wendover, and by his side. She hoped their meeting might be unwitnessed.

She resolved to provide for that object as well as she could. She would, on arriving at Wendover, where she was a stranger, inquire for his quarters, go to them, and send in a message, saying that a lady wished to see the colonel alone for a few minutes. She knew that that would be odd and disagreeable, and might even expose her to remark; but she could not help it, for she felt that she must go directly to her husband. She knew, besides, it would all be immediately righted when the whole regiment would know the whole story.

Of course, Colonel Fitzgerald, with his well-known courtesy, would at once receive the lady who wished to see him. And then she would be shown into his presence.

She knew her sudden appearance before him, as one raised from the dead, would give him a tremendous shock; but she knew it would be a shock of joy, and that he could stand it. And then the long, happy hours, days, weeks, months, years, that they would live in peace and harmony together—never, never more to be parted.

No wonder that, dreaming this dream, the young wife could not sleep.

I have taken my readers so often over this mountain-road, that it is not necessary to make this journey as tedious to them as it was to Gertrude.

The coach went over the same hills, through the same forests, up and down the same mountain ridges, stopping to change horses at the same post-houses, and to take breakfast, dinner, or supper at the same wayside inns, dropping old passengers and picking up new (all strangers to Sallust and Gertrude) at various stations on the road, until about sunset on the second day it reached Blackville, where it stopped at the Black Bear Inn to take supper and to change horses.

Here Sallust and Gertrude were to part company. Sallust was to go on to Wildeville, where he would probably arrive in the afternoon of the next day, and Gertrude was to change coaches and proceed to Wendover, where she would arrive about sunrise the next morning.

While seated at the supper-table, Sallust again, in a low voice, protested against leaving Gertrude to make the night journey down the Black River Road to Wendover alone; and would have insisted on accompanying her as her body-guard, but the little lady was so firm in her

resolve to go unattended that he had to submit to her will, but it was under protest.

"I tell you what, Cousin Gertrude," he said, "if any fellow were misled by your face to buy you for a lamb he'd be taken in a jolly sight! You've got a will of your own, and you submit when you see fit, and not otherwise. I pity Fitzgerald if ever your two wills should clash! that I do!" growled Sallust.

"Well, yes, you *may* pity us if ever our wills should clash," replied Gertrude.

The shrill blast of the stage-horn startled them both.

"There's your coach!" exclaimed Gertrude, rising from the table.

"Yes," said Sallust, following her example, and then attending her to the quiet parlour, where in the open fireplace a pleasant fire of oak logs burned.

"I suppose you will wait here until your coach is ready to start?"

"Yes," replied Gertrude.

"Well, good-by! Take good care of yourself!"

"Good-by! God bless you for all your goodness to me, Cousin Sallust. Run now, they have stopped blowing the horn! that means that the coach is actually about to start."

"Good-by, then," exclaimed Sallust, a second time. And off he ran.

Anxious that he should recover his seat, Gertrude went to the window, and watched and listened. She saw him rush out, hail the coach just as it was off, climb into his seat, and disappear as the coach rolled away.

Then she returned to her seat by the wood fire, and sat waiting for the Wendover stage.

A negro man, with his arms full of hickory logs, came in.

"What time will the Wendover stage start?" she inquired.

"In five minutes after it comes, Miss. It comes from Staunton, you know, and we expect it every minute," answered the man, as he laid the logs on the fire.

Even as he spoke, the shrill notes of the stage-horn were heard, announcing its approach.

Gertrude arose, put on her hat, and took her muff and travelling-bag and went out.

The hostlers were actively engaged, some in leading away the tired horses from their harness, and others leading out fresh ones to take their places. Several passengers got out of the coach and took off their light luggage, and entered the hotel, as if their journey by that vehicle ended there.

Gertrude stepped down off the porch, with the intention of entering the coach, when suddenly she found her hand taken and drawn into an arm. Turning quickly, she saw Sallust Rowley at her side.

"Oh, Cousin Sallust! You here, after all!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I *did* start on the Wildeville stage! Honestly I *did!* But I hadn't gone a hundred yards before I began to think of you left alone in this hotel, and I could not stand it! So I stopped the stage and jumped out, and ran all the way back! But only to see you safe inside this coach, Cousin Gertrude—not to intrude my company on you."

"But, Sallust, you have lost your own coach, and you will have to remain here until another passes," replied Gertrude.

"Well, a night's rest will not do me any harm, and another coach for Wildeville will pass here early in the morning. I shall take that. But, come, let me put you in and see that you are comfortable."

She thanked him, and permitted him to hand her into her place—not the best back seat now, for the whole of the back bench was occupied; but to a middle seat on the middle bench.

"In some respects it is the most desirable; for, being in the centre of the coach, it is the easiest on the springs," whispered Sallust, as he "took stock" of the other passengers inside.

He was very much relieved on Gertrude's account, by perceiving that her fellow-travellers on this night journey were to be—a motherly-looking matron, an equally fatherly-seeming old gentleman, two young girls and two boys, all forming one family party.

"Now I feel a great deal better about you, Cousin Gertrude. I feel that you will travel safely in this company; but mind, be sure to tell Gerald that it is not my fault you travel unattended."

"I will tell him everything to your honour, Sallust, of that you may be very sure."

The parting-horn blew a shrill blast, and the coach started so suddenly as nearly to throw Mr. Rowley off the steps, where he had been standing all this time.

With a hasty good-by he dropped to the ground, while the stage rolled off into the darkness of the Black River Road—a turnpike that ran through thick woods along the banks of a deep, dark stream.

Gertrude sank back in her seat and delivered herself up to dreaming her one dream of the meeting now so near at hand.

Her fellow-passengers seemed to have commenced their journey from a village a few miles from Blackville, for they did not appear to be the least tired, but engaged in an animated conversation about their journey and their plans, that effectually broke up Gertrude's reverie.

After a while, however, the old people composed themselves to rest, and the boys dropped off to sleep; but the girls stayed awake, and kept up a vivacious duet about their young friends and their beaux—talking with far more freedom than formerly, and seeming totally forgetful or oblivious to the presence of a stranger.

Gertrude could neither sleep nor dream; but she sometimes looked out, seeing nothing on her left but the Black Woods, that seemed a wall of darkness, but on the right catching occasional glimmers of the Black River, as its deep waters reflected a star.

The night journey passed without any incident, except the stopping of the coach at the regular post-houses to change horses, when the old people would wake up to yawn and slightly change their positions, the boys would rouse themselves to look out, and the girls would cease their garrulous talking.

When the coach would start again, the old folks and the boys would relapse into sleep, and the girls would recommence chattering.

It must have been long after midnight, when these young ladies succumbed to drowsiness and fell asleep.

Last of all, Gertrude also dropped into fitful slumbers that lasted until morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEWS THAT MET HER.

THE stage-coach reached the mountain town of Wendover about sun-rise; not that the sun was visible, however, for the sky was overclouded and threatening rain.

The coach drove to the "Bald Eagle Inn," where it stopped, and where the passengers got out for breakfast.

Gertrude, too intensely eager for the meeting that should end all her troubles to think of eating, just hastily drank a cupful of strong coffee, to keep up her overtasked strength, then directed her baggage to be carried into the stage-office and kept there until called for, and then, without mentioning the name of Colonel Fitzgerald, just inquired for the quarters of the —th Regiment of Cavalry.

She was directed to the barracks on the northern suburbs of the town. The distance was too long to admit of her walking thither in her present weary condition. She engaged the only hack at the Bald Eagle Inn.

It was a dilapidated old carriage, drawn by one horse and driven by a white-headed old negro man.

Gertrude entered this vehicle, and directed the driver to the Wendover Barracks.

The drive occupied but an hour; though to the young wife's intensely wrought up feelings, it seemed endless, as hoping, fearing, trembling, almost fainting, she passed the ordeal until the low white wall of the barracks came in sight, and the old carriage drew up before the principal gate.

A sentinel was pacing up and down before it. A young lieutenant was seated on a camp chair, leaning

against the outside of the wall, engaged in reading a paper and smoking a cigar.

Gertrude climbed down from the awkward old carriage, and, almost breathless with intense emotion, advanced towards him.

The officer, seeing the lady approach, threw away his cigar, arose, lifted his hat, and stood waiting her pleasure.

But Gertrude could not speak; her emotions choked her utterance; her very breath seemed failing her; she suddenly grew so pale that the officer hastily handed her his chair, and then politely inquired if he could serve her.

She laid her hand on the back of the chair for support, made an effort, recovered her breath and her speech, and inquired, falteringly:

"Is—Colonel—Fitzgerald—here?" Then unable longer to stand, she sank into the chair.

"No, madam, Colonel Fitzgerald left on the first for a month's leave," answered the lieutenant.

Gertrude did not faint, no, nor move. But at that moment she was threatened with sudden madness. The thought shot into her brain that she was the victim of a hallucination, and was pursuing a phantom that was forever flying before her. Nothing seemed real now to her dazed mind and despairing heart! So often she had been on the very eve of meeting her husband and had missed him by a few days, a few hours, a few minutes! Was it all real or a dream of insanity? Had she any husband at all? Was she herself? Had Gerald any real existence?

She grew terrified and caught herself suddenly when falling into this chaos. She collected her faculties by a supreme effort of will. She looked up and saw that the officer was standing before her now, with a glass of wine in his hand. She took it, and bowed her thanks, and drank a portion of it. Then returning the half empty glass, she inquired, faintly:

"Can you tell me, sir, where Colonel Fitzgerald has gone to spend his leave?"

"The colonel has gone down into Wilde county to his own house at the Summit, madam," replied the lieutenant.

Now, it will have been observed that nearly all strangers, who did not know her position, always, in

speaking to this youthful wife, addressed her as "Miss." But some finer intuition taught this officer that he must give the lady before him the more respectful title.

"'At the Summit,' echoed Gertrude, and a ray of comfort stole into the desolation of her broken hopes.

She began to see that though the long-desired, long-deferred meeting was again delayed, yet it was so for only a single day, and that, indeed, under all the circumstances, the meeting had better take place in the Summit Manor House, their own home, than in the public barracks.

Rallying from her depression, she turned to the officer, and said:

"I thank you, sir, for the kindness you have shown me. Good-morning."

"Allow me to hand you to your carriage, madam."

She gave him her hand, and permitted him to place her in her seat.

Then she bowed her thanks to the lieutenant, and gave to the coachman, in one word:

"Back."

"I wonder who she is?" cogitated the lieutenant, as the carriage rolled away; "a lady most certainly; a near relative of Fitzgerald's, probably; yet I *could* not tell her that the colonel had gone down to Wilde county to marry Miss Geraldine Fitzgerald, and that they would be married to-morrow morning! That would have been news for her indeed, if she is a stranger here, as she seems to be. Now, why the deuce couldn't I tell her? I don't know: but some feeling withheld me. Who *can* she be, and what can be the cause of that great interest in the colonel that brought her to the verge of swooning with distress when she discovered that he had left the barracks? I cannot even imagine. It is all very queer; but at any rate, I wish the little lady well."

CHAPTER XVII.

AT HADDON'S FERRY.

MEANWHILE Gertrude drove back to the hotel, almost reconciled to her temporary disappointment in missing Colonel Fitzgerald at the barracks, and to the short delay that would give her the much more satisfactory meeting with him in the privacy of their own beautiful home at Summit Manor.

She knew now that he was living, and that he was well, and she felt perfectly secure in her faith that she should certainly find him at the Summit.

"It would be so much sweeter to meet him there than anywhere else, and I know that I can get there by this hour to-morrow morning—in twenty-four hours or less," she murmured to herself.

Poor child! She was happily unconscious that the mission of Gerald Fitzgerald down into Wilde county was to marry his Cousin Geraldine; that their wedding was fixed to take place on that very same morning to which she was looking forward with such eager delight in the anticipation of meeting her beloved husband, at last, after so long a separation and so many cruel disappointments.

When she reached the Bald Eagle Inn, she alighted from the carriage and went into the parlour, where she found the elderly couple, with their sons and daughters, who had been her fellow travellers from Blackville, seated in their travelling dresses, and evidently from their conversation, waiting most impatiently for the arrival of their family coach, which was to meet them here and take them home.

Gertrude bowed courteously to this party as she entered, and then, without seating herself, she went and rang the bell.

A coloured waiter promptly answered the summons.

"How far is it from this place to Wildeville—do you know?" she inquired.

"Well, from thirty to thirty-five miles, Miss; some say one and some say t'other," replied the man, in a hesitating and uncertain manner.

"Is there any public conveyance thither?"

"Well, no, Miss, not without you went a very round-about way—indeed, Miss, going all the way back to Blackville, which is about double the distance, Miss, being about seventy miles off, and taking the Washington and West Virginia coach from that point, and then going thirty miles farther to Wildeville," explained the man.

"Oh, that would not do at all," exclaimed Gertrude; "to travel one hundred miles to reach a place that is only thirty miles distant! Besides, I only came from Blackville this morning. Oh! if I had only known that Colonel Fitzgerald had left Wendover, I could have gone on from Blackville last night, and I should by this time have reached the Summit, and met my husband!" she added, mentally.

"Well, Miss, there ain't no other public conveyance," said the waiter, answering her first objections.

"Can I procure a private conveyance to take me to Wildeville to-day, then?" she anxiously inquired.

"I don't know, Miss, but I can see."

"Do so, if you please."

The waiter left the room to perform his errand.

His exit was soon followed by the entrance of the landlord, a big behemoth of a man, with fair hair, florid complexion, and beaming blue eyes, otherwise a regular specimen of the old-fashioned country host.

"You were wanting a conveyance to Wildeville, young lady?" he blandly inquired.

"Yes, if you please," answered Gertrude, gently. "Almost anything would do. I came in the Blackville coach this morning, and expected to see a friend here whom I have failed to meet. I must therefore, go on to Wilde county at once. Can I have a conveyance?"

"Well, yes, Miss; you can have the carriage you had this morning. It is not a very nice one, but it is the best we've got. The horse isn't fast, but he is strong, and

good for a long journey; and the driver isn't very spry and active, but he is old and steady."

"That will do very well, indeed. How soon can it be ready?"

"In half an hour, Miss—as soon as the horse takes a feed, and the driver gets his breakfast."

"Thanks; very well. One word more. I shall leave my heavy luggage here until I send for it."

"All right, Miss," said the landlord, leaving the room to give his orders in the stable, muttering to himself:

"Now, I wonder who she is? There's no name on the trunk, only two letters—G. F. And, above all, I wonder what her friends can be thinking about, to let a chit of a child run around the country alone like that? If it were the holidays now, I should think she was some school girl coming home."

While the carriage was being prepared for her, Gertrude took her keys from her pocket, and went into the stage-office, opened her large trunk, and took from it a change of clothing, her water-proof cloak (for the heavy clouds still threatened rain,) and a few other articles, all of which she made up into a compact bundle, to be placed in the carriage with her.

Then she relocked her trunk and returned to the parlour, where she found the landlord standing by the table with a covered basket before him.

"It is your dinner, Miss, for your road to Wildeville lies through a wilderness, where there is not a house you could stop at to get a mouthful to eat," he explained.

"Oh, thank you very much indeed. And now please let me pay your bill, including the hire of the carriage, also," she said.

The landlord took pencil and paper from his pocket, and summed up the items and gave it to her.

"Ten dollars," she said—"that is very reasonable."

And from the purse so liberally replenished by the advances of good Captain Wailes, she settled her bill.

The landlord now told her that her carriage was ready, and took up the basket, the bundle and the hand-bag to carry them out for her.

"By the way," she said, after she had taken her seat, and while the good man was putting in her belongings and arranging them around her—"by the way, which is

the nearest point from this place, Wildeville or Haddon's Ferry?"

"Haddon's Ferry is about three miles nearer, Miss."

"Oh, indeed! And it is also nearer to the Summit," she mentally added.

"Had'n Fay good fibe mile nighest, Marse Tom," put in the old negro driver.

"And is the road as good as that to Wildeville?" inquired Gertrude.

"Same road all de way tell you gits to Cave Court Cross Roads, which is where de road forks out, and de right han' one go to Had'n Fay, which is on'y fibe mile off, an' good trab'ling, and de lef' hand go to Wildeville, which is ten mile off and mighty bad trab'ling."

"Then I will go to Haddon's Ferry, instead of to Wildeville. I am sorry to have kept you out so long, sir. Good-morning," said Gertrude, courteously.

The landlord lifted his hat, and the old coachman drove off. Gertrude was pleased to see that, in case the rain should fall, he was well protected from the weather, as his seat was under the front roof of the carriage and his limbs were covered with the leathern apron of the same.

Their road, on leaving the town, lay for miles along the banks of the "Wend," and then turned off into a deep forest that grew deeper and darker as they penetrated farther into its shadows.

Gertrude had recovered from the first shock of her disappointment, and was really calmer now than she had been since she had landed in the country.

There were many reasons why she should be so.

She had now the first certain intelligence of Colonel Fitzgerald that she had received since she had left London twelve months before. She now knew that he was alive and well and at his own home, where she expected to see him the next morning; and where, indeed, under all the circumstances, it would be so much better to meet him than at the barracks, as to be quite worth the disappointment of not finding him at his quarters, and the delay of twenty-four hours.

The solitude of the forest, too, had a composing influence on her. The old white-haired negro, who sat before her, leisurely holding the reins of the horse, who

never moved out of his pace, was in perfect keeping with the scene.

The landlord of the Bald Eagle, rightly characterized this route as an old road through a wilderness; but it was a lovely old road through a grand old wilderness.

Gertrude had passed through many vicissitudes, and seen many places since she first left Wilde County as the bride of Gerald Fitzgerald, but there was on this long, quiet day's drive through the still old forest something so peaceful, soothing, comforting, that it lived in her memory long after more important scenes had faded out.

Her white-haired coachman had not the garrulity of his race, but was ready to answer any questions she might put to him.

They travelled slowly, for the beautiful road was rather rugged under the wheels, and the horse was old, so their journey took a longer time than it should have done. It was ten o'clock when they left Wendover; it was two o'clock when they stopped to lunch in the heart of the forest; and it was four o'clock when they reached the Cave Court Cross Road and took the road along the east base of the Eagle Roost Ridge, and entered the pass which, by many circuitous turns and twists, ascents and descents, was to take them down to the banks of the Wilde River, opposite Haddon's Ferry.

This perilous pass required the most careful driving, and took so much time that it was six o'clock and quite dark when they reached the last declivity. Here the cautious old coachman drew from his pocket a box of matches, with one of which he lighted the carriage lamps. Then he carefully descended to the water's edge and drew up.

Gertrude gazed once more in breathless joy upon the scene of her childhood's life.

With what strange sensations she gazed upon it! All the years of absence, the wondrous scenes through which she had passed, her adventures by sea and land, her perils, her sufferings, her long endurance, seemed now a dream from which she had awakened, and nothing was real but the scene before her!

There, at her feet, was the little Eagle Roost boat-house, with its lighted lantern swinging over the door,

There below her rolled the Wilde, her own bright river, her frolicsome playmate, her faithful servant, her capricious tormentor—now, indeed, dark with night and cloud, as she had often seen it before. Beyond the water towered the black heights of Wildcat Cliffs against the gloomy sky. At their base stood the white walled old ferry-house, faintly gleaming through the darkness, and nearer glimmered the lantern of the big boat-house.

The voice of the old coachman broke the spell that bound the little lady.

"Well, Miss, here we is, safe and sound, and not a drap o' rain yet, thank the Marster! Now, what you do, Miss? Get out'n de carriage, or sit in it till I go down dere to the boat-house, and blow de horn for de ferry?"

"I will get out, if you please, and go and call the boat myself. I have been used to doing so," said Gertrude, and she gave him her hand to help her from the carriage, and sprang lightly to the ground.

"We have been so much longer coming than we expected, that it is now too late for you to go back to Cave Court Cross Roads to put up, so I shall call the flat-boat to take the horse and carriage over," said Gertrude, as the old man took one of the lamps from the carriage to light her to the boat-house.

"No, mist'ess; please don't call no flat-boat. I got a good friend and brudder in de church, lib long o' Marse Sam Hall, little piece down de ribber, an' I go stop 'long o' him to-night, and I know I kin put up de horse and carriage in de stable dere. Dere's plenty o' room," eagerly replied the old man.

"Well, if it isn't too far."

"On'y 'bout half a mile, young mist'ess."

"Very well, then," said Gertrude.

They had now reached the little boat-house.

Gertrude, looking down, made an exclamation of surprise, for there lay her own little boat, the "Water Lily," freshly painted white as snow, and rocking on the edge of the river, as if waiting for her. The oars were laid along the cross seats. And in the boat was another article that explained its presence there—an old glazed jacket and hat belonging to John Brooks, which that stalwart oarsman only used when on the water, and always left in the boat when he had an errand on land.

"John Brooks, the boatman, is on this side. I am glad that you have got a good friend to go to to-night, for I could not get the flat-boat over, or any other boat, indeed, for there is no one there to bring it. I shall take this boat and go over."

"You, Miss! Don't, please! You'll be drowned!" anxiously exclaimed the old coachman.

"Not the least bit of danger. I was brought up at the ferry, and have been used to rowing ever since I was ten years old."

"That indeed, mist'ess! Well, but if I dared to leave the horse I would go 'long to take care of you, dough I neber tetched an oar in all my life."

"Then you would only make the boat heavier for me. I shall be quite safe. Hold the lamp a little nearer."

The old man lowered the lamp to her level, and she took a piece of note-paper and a pencil and wrote:

"*John*, I am obliged to take the boat; call when you come. and I will return and fetch you. G. F."

This she pinned conspicuously on the boatman's glazed jacket, and then hung it with the hat under the boat-house lantern.

Then she opened her purse and gave the old coachman a half-eagle, saying:

"That is for yourself, Uncle Gideon, and I thank you for all your attention to me."

"Lord bress you, young mist'ess, I'm so much obliged to you. I gwine stop and wait here till you get across safe, and den wave a light, or blow a horn, or somefin, to let me know, will you, mist'ess?"

"Certainly; but there is no danger. I am as much at home on the water as on the land—as safe in a boat as in a house. Now hand me that bundle from the carriage, Uncle Gideon."

The old man hastened to do her bidding and brought her the parcel.

She took from it her waterproof cloak and then threw the bundle into the boat.

Then she drew the cloak on over her other dress, and drew the hood over her hat, and detached the lantern from the hook over the door of the boat-house and

fastened it on the boat. Next she untied the little skiff, entered it, seated herself and took up the oars.

"Good-by, Uncle Gideon," she exclaimed, as she shot out into the water.

"Lord bress you, young mistress! Good-by! *hooray!*" shouted the old man, waving his hat above his head.

Guided by the light on the opposite shore, Gertrude sped over the dark river, making little phosphorescent glimmers with her oars as they flashed up and down, back and forth in the water.

She neared the shore, touched the sands, then drew in the oars, laid one in the bottom of the boat, and using the other as a pole, struck it into the sand, and pushed the pretty *Water Lily* up high and dry.

Then she stepped out, secured the skiff, took the lantern in her hand, waved it as a signal to the watcher on the other side, and finally opened the back gate of the garden, and walked towards the house.

There she was again!—waterproof cloak, hood, lantern, and all, walking the old road once more, just as she had seen herself in her inner sight, even while dressed like a princess she had been promenading the grand saloon at the ball at the Tuileries.

She thought of that now, and smiled to think how harmlessly her alarming second sight had been realized. But indeed it seemed now as though but yesterday since she had left the ferry; yet she had been away two years and five months. What had happened there in the meanwhile? Everything looked as usual, as far as she could see in the darkness. Had anything happened! Was old Jess still living? A pang of fear smote her for the first time that the old woman might have died. It had been more than two years since she had seen her, and more than twelve months since she had heard from her.

But as she drew nearer to the dear old house, her fears were set at rest. She saw a cheerful light burning through the north window of the old kitchen, and she heard a weird voice singing the refrain of a camp-meeting hymn.

"Oh, that will be joyful!
Joyful! joyful! joyful!
Oh, that will be joyful,
When we meet to part no more!

When we meet to part no more
On Jordan's happy shore,
Where we shall meet
At Jesus's feet,
And meet to part no more!"

Gertrude walked around the house, and looked in at the north window.

There sat Jess in her old flag-bottomed chair before the blazing kitchen fire, with an open hymn-book in her lap, and with her eyes rolled up to the ceiling, singing herself into a religious rapture. Not that Jess could read a line; yet neither could she sing comfortably, without her hymn-book.

Gertrude retreated, went to the front door, opened it softly, and passed into the house.

Oh, how familiar, how home-like, how sweet! No one appeared to welcome her, yet it seemed as though invisible friends met her, invisible love surrounded and enveloped her.

She passed down the central passage, and opened the back door on the right and entered the kitchen.

Jess, sitting before the fire, had her back towards the door, but on hearing the sound she looked over her shoulder, got one glimpse of Gertrude standing there "in her habit as she lived," waterproof cloak, hood, lantern and all!—took her for a ghost, uttered an ear-splitting shriek, sprang up, dropped her hymn-book and fled to the farthest corner of the kitchen, where she stood at bay.

"Aunt Jess, don't be frightened; it is I," said Gertrude, approaching the panic-stricken woman.

But an awful howl from Jess arrested her footsteps.

"Don't come no furder! *Disap*-PEAR! In de name ob de Lord—*disap*-PEAR!" yelled the frenzied creature, shaking from head to foot, as with an ague fit, and ashen gray with terror, as the negroes grow when they turn pale at all.

"But, dear Jess.—"

"I know what yer come for! I know what's ris yer out'n yer watery grabe! but it ain't no fau't o' mine! I couldn't help of it! Go 'pear to *she!* Don't 'pear to *me!* *Disap*-PEAR! Oh, my good laws a me, I'll go crazy! *Wanish!* In de name ob de Law—WANISH!"

"Jess! I am flesh and blood! feel me!" she said, approaching the maddened woman.

"*Ah-ah-ah!-ah!*" yelled Jess, dropping down in the corner, and clapping both hands to her ears—"Don't tetch me! don't speak to me!"

Gertrude was "perplexed in the extreme." She was, moreover, fearful lest the woman, in her panic of terror should fall into convulsions. Casting a despairing glance around the kitchen, as if to find some means of convincing her old nurse of her own continued existence in the flesh, she saw on the clean pine table a white pitcher of milk, a plate of bread, a goblet, and a knife—all probably placed there for the refreshment of Mr. John Brooks, when he should return home.

"Jess never heard of a ghost eating and drinking," she said to herself, as she put her lantern on the floor, sat down to the table, cut a slice of bread, poured out a glass of milk, and began to eat and drink.

Jess watched the process until her ecstasy of terror merged into simple amazement. Then she began to mutter, as she gazed:

"No, she ain't a ghost, but she's the nightmare!—dat's what she is—the nightmare! I hadn't no business eatin' all dat dare b'ilded pork and hominy for supper. Lor! how dat nightmare did scare me. 'Deed, it's most killed me. I wish it would go 'way now," she ruminated.

"Jess, are you now convinced that I am your child, Gertrude, and no ghost?" inquired the little lady, as she rose from the table.

"I know you ain't no ghost, 'cause no ghost ever could put away all dat milk and bread as you've eat and drunk—cause where could a ghost put it? But I know what yer is, fast enough! Yer's a nightmare, that's what yer is. I eat too much for supper and has got de nightmare, and can't wake myself up. I wish John Brooks 'ud come home and wake me up. I might die in my sleep of a popoplexy, all along of such a nightmare as this on de brain."

"Will you let me come near you now, Jess?"

"Yes; but don't sit on my chest. When people get de nightmare on to de top o' de chest it turns to an old hag and chokes 'em to deaf sometimes. Mind you, don't set on me."

"I won't sit on you, Jess. Come now, stand up, return to your chair by the fire," said Gertrude, taking the old woman by the hand and leading her back to her seat.

"Now, I wonder if I *is* 'wake arter all! Dis seem monsous nateral, and likewise monsous *un*-nateral," muttered Jess to herself, beginning to be shaken in her theory of the nightmare as she had been in that of the ghost.

Gertrude drew another chair to her side, and took her hand and said:

"Jess, look me in the eyes while I speak to you. I am myself, Gertrude. I was not drowned. It was a false report. Do you understand that, Jess?"

"I—I dunno!" muttered the still amazed and bewildered creature.

"False reports get out sometimes, you know. I was not drowned, as everybody believed me to have been. I was rescued from the sea; but I have suffered many misfortunes, dear Jess. I have been twice shipwrecked—think of that!—once by fire and once by ice. The first in the burning of the *Messenger* in the straits of Dover, of which you have all heard, when I was supposed to be lost, but when I was really rescued by a dear, brave boy, and afterwards picked up by a fishing smack and sheltered in a fisherman's cottage. The second time was when I was coming home on the *Zanzibar*, when the ship was wrecked on an island of ice off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

"We were all put in the life-boats, and the next day the boat that I was in was picked up by a merchantman, the *Becky*, Captain Wailes, God bless them both! She was bound for San Francisco, the way of Cape Horn — nearly a twelve months' voyage, coming and going, Jess. So you see I was carried all around the world! And, oh! Jess, in all that dreary time I was separated from my dear husband, and without the means of writing to him to let him know that I was living! I love him so dearly, Jess, he is my very life and health, and absence from him is like a living death.

"I grieved and pined so, Jess, that I lost health and strength. That is the reason why I look so pale and wan, you take me for a ghost. But I shall grow better and better every day, for I am at home now and at peace, for I know that to-morrow I shall meet my

husband, and all will be well," she concluded, in her tender and pathetic voice.

All this time the old woman had remained with her eyes immovably fixed on the face of the delicate creature before her, muttering inarticulately, in an awestruck tone, until at length the deep love and compassion of her motherly heart helped her sluggish intellect to comprehend the situation and she clasped her hands and murmured inaudibly:

"*It is herself!* It is her own, dear, precious self. And oh! my Heabenly Lord! de husband she dotes on so much, gwine to be married to another gal to-morrow. But she shan't hab him! No, please my Heabenly Marster, sha'n't she. I'll be in time to 'vent dat, sure's my name's Jessamine Bell. But I must be airly dough. What de ole sayin' say? 'De worm catches de airly bird!' Heap o' sense in dem ole sayin's!"

"Jess! Oh! Jess, you *do* know me now, don't you? Oh, dear Jess, don't deny and reject me. I am at my old home at last, and I want to be recognized and comforted, dear Jess!" pleaded Gertrude, holding out her hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT REST.

"OH, my lamb! my lamb! is it indeed yourself? And have you suffered so much? And did your stupid old nurse deny you?" cried old Jess, opening her arms to her "child."

Gertrude went into them, and was folded lovingly to the motherly bosom. Jess bowed her face over the young head pillowed there, and wept aloud, muttering:

"And to think I should have denied and dejected my poor child, coming back like Noah's weary dove to her ark. To think I should have denied and dejected her, and called her a ghost and a nightmare!"

"It was natural, dear soul, when you thought I had been drowned a year ago," said Gertrude, soothingly, caressing the poor dark face.

"Yes, honey, I did fink you was lost; and it was jes' de heabiest cross as ebber I was called upon to lif' and tote. And, honey, I was jes' a finking ob you dis bery identical Wednesday night, which started me to singing dat wery hymn as you must a heard me singing when you come up. 'Bout meetin' 'on Jordan's happy shore,' chile. It was you I was thinkin' ob meetin', you, honey, morn 'n anybody else. I allers sings dat hymn when I gets low in my mind about dem as has gone before, thinkin' maybe, arter all, dey's buried inter de ground, 'stead o' bein' 'scended into Heaben."

"You should never think that, Jess. No human being was ever buried yet unless he was buried alive; and even *then* the grave could not hold him, for as soon as the body should be suffocated there the man would be released and ascend. There are no human beings in

the ground, Jess. Those who have passed away before us have ascended, and are more alive than we are. Yes, as much more alive as the bird *out* of the shell is more alive than the bird *in* it. These mortal bodies are only our shells, Jess, and when we chip the shells, and not until then, we are truly alive!"

"That's berry comfortin' to a poor soul like me, whose body is getting so ole and feeble. And to think it is yourself sure enough, honey, and no ghost, and no nightmare! Yourself talkin' your old sweet talk. And I nearly scared out o' my senses a thinking as you was a sperit!"

"Well, Jess, if I had been a spirit—*as I am*—why should that have frightened you? *You* are a spirit, Jess, a spirit in the body, like a bird in a shell. Why should you be afraid of a spirit out of the body?"

"I dunno, honey, but I *am*, and if I was to see a sperit it would kill me dead—dere!"

"You will never see a spirit, Jess. Not one in millions ever have had their inner sight opened to behold spirits. It is not permitted, Jess. It would make too much confusion in this material world."

"I b'lieve yer, honey! It would make 'fusion enough in one ole head, and dat's mine. But here's me a chatterin' like an ole goose, 'stead o' gettin' you some warm supper, an' makin' ob you comfortable. Get offen my knees, honey, and let me get up and put de kettle on."

"I don't want anything, Jess. I have eaten a hearty supper of rich milk, and sweet light bread."

"Well, to be sure, that's aggravatin', when I could a' got you a br'iled partridge, and an omelette, and rice waffles, and tea and cream, and—"

"Get them for breakfast, dear Jess," said Gertrude, as she arose and took off her waterproof cloak, her jacket, and her hat.

"So I will, honey, and a splendid breakfas' I will get for you. But, goodness! now I think ob it, chile, where *did* you drap from? Right down out'n de sky, didn't yer?"

"No, not quite, Jess. Sit up to the fire now, and I will tell you about it," said Gertrude, taking a chair and drawing it up to the kitchen fire and seating herself upon it.

As soon as Jess took the place at her side, Gertrude said, briefly:

"The ship that picked me up from the life-boat and carried me all around the world, landed me in Baltimore on Sunday last. From there I came by rail to Washington. From there I came by coach to Wendover. From there by a hired carriage down to the Eagle Roost landing. From there I crossed the river in the *Water Lily*, which I found at the little boat-house. Now, Jess, you have all in brief. Some time I will tell it all to you in detail, but not now; I am too tired. I must rest myself, for presently I expect to hear John Brooks call:

"'Boat!'"

"And then I shall have to go for him."

"No, you won't, I reckon, honey! John Brooks said as he didn't know he should be home to-night at all! And it's so late now, I don't expect as he'll come home until morning! I'll go fix your bed for you, honey!" said the old woman, rising.

"No, do not, Aunt Jess. Sit still. Oh! I have so many questions to ask you. You know I have not heard from home for so long. First of all tell me about my husband. Have you seen him lately? I was told at the Wendover Barracks that he was quite well, and that he had left on the 1st of February for the Summit, on a month's leave. Of course he must have crossed this ferry. Did you see him? How was he looking? Did he speak of me?"

"Stop, honey!" exclaimed old Jess, suddenly starting up. "I think I hear a weasel out dere, arter de hens!"

And she rushed out of the back door into the poultry-yard.

Having got there, she leaned up against the house wall, with her heart beating violently.

"Oh, my laws in Heaben, what I gwine say to her now? Her comin' on a body so sudden, and puttin' me out o' my senses, first wid fear, and den wid joy, knocked it all clean out'n my head, when it ought to a-knocked it harder in, if it did anything! She, de wife, comin' home to-night, an' he, de husband, gwine to be married

to-morrow! But I can't tell her to-night! No, I can't break my lamb's heart to-night, and she so glad to get home! 'Sides which, it wouldn't do a bit of good, for she can't do nothin' to-night! She'd only lay awake, and cry all night, and maybe cry herself into a spell of sickness!

"No, I won't tell her to-night. Wild horses shan't draw it out'n me to-night! I'll put her to bed, sweet and comfortable, in her own little nest, and then jes' as soon as dat good-for-nothin' creetur, John Brooks, gid back, as is allers out't de way when he's mos' wanted, I'll send him, post haste, to tell de news to Parson Goodwin, and borrow his gig on a matter of life and deaf! And den I'll tell her, and John Brooks can drive her over to St. Paytrick's Church, to 'bid de banns an' stop de weddin'.

"Wonder what Madam Ger'ldin' look like den? But we must look sharp and be in a hurry, or we might be too late. Sho! too late for what? S'pose he does marry her? Dat won't mount to nuffin, and his true wife living. If Madam Ger'ldin' so fresh as to marry another woman's husband, dat's *her* look-out, not our'n. And serbe her right, too. Neber gib de man any peace of his life till he 'gaged himself to marry her!"

"Jess! Jess! where are you?" called the voice of Gertrude from the house. "Have the weasels carried off you as well as the chickens?"

"No, honey. But I'm a-gwine for a weasel all de same—a two-legged weasel," answered Jess, rather incoherently.

"Come in, Jess. I want to talk to you."

"I's comin', honey. Here I is!" exclaimed the old woman, re-entering the kitchen, and resuming her seat near Gertrude.

"Jess, I asked you if you had seen Colonel Fitzgerald, and how he looked," said Gertrude.

"Oh, yes, honey, I seen him last Friday as never was, when he passed the ferry on his way to the Summit."

"How did he look, Jess?" eagerly inquired the little lady.

"Honey, I 'spose he was well enough in body, but he looked mighty melancholy. Tell you de trufe, honey, he

ain't *neber* looked like himself since he tought he lost you, and dat's a fac'!"

"Oh, my dear Gerald, my dearest Gerald! You have suffered as much as I have!" murmured Gertrude to herself.

"Did he speak of me, Jess?"

"He didn't speak ob hardly anything else, honey. He stay'd all night here, and I beliebe in my soul it was only to talk about you! He made me tell him all about you, when you was a child, honey, and when you was a growing gal. And when bed-time come, nothing would suit him but he must sleep in your room! He did say, though, that he and Parson Goodwin, as was your gardeen, was not going to 'low any change into de ferry, for some years to come yet; but to leabe fings here jes' as dey are. He said he would leabe me and ole John Brooks here for *your* sake, 'cause he knew you loved us and the old ferry, and ebery fing you loved or cared for was dear to him."

"Did he say that? Did Gerald say that?" she murmured softly to herself.

But Jess heard her, and answered earnestly:

"Yes, honey, he did, and a great deal more! He did seem to take comfort in talking to me about you. La! why not? Wasn't I his nuss, when his mammy died? Didn't I bring him up on my own bosom long afore I ever come to lib at de ferry? And wasn't I *your* nurse arterward? And didn't I bring you up on my lap? Hush, honey! You and Marse Ger'ld jes' like my own dear chillun, ef you *is* white and me black."

"And we both love you dearly, Jess, you know that," said Gertrude, tenderly.

"Yes, honey, you is bofe de comfort ob my old age! Why not, when I nussed you bofe when you was little and helpless? On'y dere was a long time atween yer! La! Marse Geral' is a heap older'n you, chile!—fifteen or sixteen year older."

"Oh, I know it. I wish I was nearer his age for his sake," sighed the child wife.

"Don't you wish no sich nonsense as dat. He love you bes' as you is. And now, you mine dis, chile. I gwine gib you a warnin' dis night. No matter what

happen in dis world, don't you neber fink as your husband don't love you better'n de apple ob his eye. I gib you dis sollum warnin', don't you," said old Jess, meaning to prepare and fortify the mind of the young wife to sustain the shock she must receive.

"I should never doubt my husband's love. How *could* I, well as I know him? Why should you think it necessary to give me such a warning, nurse?" anxiously inquired Gertrude.

"'Cause dere is so many little miffs and tiffs in married life, you know, and de wife, she's apt to fink, 'Oh, he don't love no more,' and all dat trash," replied Jess. "But I won't lecter you no more to-night. I'm gwine upstairs to fix your room. It don't want much fixin', and I won't be long."

Jess went off before Gertrude could question her further.

Then a touching little incident occurred. The house cat came in through the door that Jess had left open, and looked at the stranger seated before the kitchen fire, and recognizing her mistress, leaped upon her lap with every demonstration of joy and affection that a poor cat could make.

Gertrude patted the cat. When Jess entered the room, she said:—

"Now, honey, come up inter yer own sweet old room as is all ready for you."

"Thank you, dear Jess," said Gertrude, as she got up and followed her leader to her own bedroom. Even as Gertrude entered, invisible love seemed to receive her, and shed its benedictions over her. Again time seemed rolled back, and it appeared as though she had but left her familiar room that morning to return to it as usual this evening.

"Come now, and set down afore dis fire, honey, and let me take down yer hair and comb and bresh it for you, like I used to do when you was little," said Jess.

Gertrude sat down to please her old nurse. Jess combed and brushed her hair, and wound it into a soft coil, and provided her with soft water, fine soap, and clean towels for a wash, and helped her until she saw her finally in bed.

"What time do you suppose John Brooks will return, Jess? I wish to know, because I must get up in time to fetch him over. There is no boat on the other side."

"Oh, honey," answered the artful Jess, "you jes' take your rest and get your sleep out good. John Brooks mayn't be back 'fore nine o'clock."

"I am sorry to hear that, because I wished him to go to the rectory and borrow the doctor's gig to take me to the Summit. The good old man is as well as ever you say, Jess?"

"Yes, honey, and gibs it to de sinners ebery Sunday morning hot as pepper."

"Jess, if John Brooks *should* come down to the river and call the boat before I am up in the morning, I want you to wake me, because I must go and fetch him over. There is no boat on that side. Do you hear me, Jess?"

"I hear you," answered the old woman.

"Well, then, bid me good-night, dear Jess."

The good creature took the hand that her child held out and pressed it to her face, and then left the room. Gertrude, wearied in mind, reposed comfortably in her own bed, and lulled by the weird music of old Jess's voice singing in the kitchen the refrain of an old camp-meeting rallying song, fell into a sweet, delicious sleep, untroubled by the ambitious thoughts that haunted the pillow of Geraldine, the bride-elect; all unsuspicious, as she was, of what the next morning was fated to bring forth.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW GERTRUDE MEETS GERALD.

IT was rather late in the morning when Gertrude awoke. The sun was glimmering through the thick leaves of the ivy that screened the east windows. The fire was burning bightly in the open fire-place, seeming to have been just replenished. Fresh water and clean towels were placed on the washstand. And lastly, a change of clothing, taken from the store Gertrude had left behind her when she first went away from the ferry, hung over the back of a chair.

By all this the little lady knew how long and deeply she must have slept, since old Jessie had had time to make all these preparations for her comfort, and to do it without disturbing her.

And now again came the strange feeling that the past experience of years was a dream of the night, from which she had awakened to find herself as usual, in her own peaceful bed-chamber.

Again invisible love seemed to surround her and shed its peace upon her, toning down an almost painful excitement with which she remembered that this was the day of days upon which she was absolutely certain to meet her husband.

She arose and made her simple toilet, offered up her morning thanksgivings and prayers, and then went downstairs to the old familiar sitting-room, where she found a cheerful wood fire burning on the hearth, and Jess engaged laying the cloth for breakfast.

"Why, lor', honey! Is you up?" inquired that good woman in surprise.

"Yes, Jess, I should think so. It is late. Why didn't you call me?"

"Time enough, honey. I should a called you in about an hour from dis, dough."

"But about John Brooks. Hasn't he called the boat yet?"

"Oh, that's all right, honey, as good luck would have it. You see, airly dis morning come down Black Bob from Hill Top Hall, going on an errand to Wildeville for his mist'ess—Miss Maxima Rowley, you know, honey, and he wanted to cross de riber. So I tell him to take de boat and row hisse'f across and den tie de boat and leabe it dere for John Brooks, which he did: and sure nuff presently down come John Brooks, and get de boat and come ober! Wasn't dat lucky?"

"Yes, indeed. Where is John? I want to send him to the Rectory to borrow the gig, you know."

"Bless you, chile, I done started him off to the Rectory t'ree hours ago. It is mos' time for him to be back. Lor', honey, ef yer had seen dat feller's face when I tell him yer come back safe and sound, and was asleep upstairs. But I started him off immediate for de gig."

"Oh, Jess, you acted so wisely! I am so thankful to you," said Gertrude, eagerly.

While they had been talking Jess had been running in and out from the sitting-room to the kitchen bringing the breakfast from the fire, and arranging it upon the table.

"Come, honey, here you is! You ain't had no better breakfas' dan dat since you bin away, no matter where you's been—coffee, cream, light rolls, rice cakes, fresh butter, Wilde River trout, partridge, and *my own* mush-room ketchup and current jelly—DERE!"

"No, Jess, I have not had a better breakfast than this since I have been away," replied Gertrude, as she seated herself at the neatly-laid table, wishing for the capacity to do justice to old Jessie's culinary art. But, in truth, her eager impatience to meet her husband had deprived her of all appetite, and she made but a slight breakfast, and then apologized to Jess, telling her frankly the true reason.

"No wonder, chile, no wonder," said Jess, suddenly growing very grave and sorrowful. "Now, sit down here, honey, in dis ole arm-chair ob yer grandfader's, and I'll take de liberty to sit down by you for a little while. De

breakfas'-table can wait, for once, for I has got somefin to tell you, and I must get it over 'fore John Brooks comes back wid de gig."

"Gerald! Gerald! But you told me he was well!" gasped Gertrude, sinking into the arm-chair.

"Yes, honey, he be well, only sorrowful, as I said."

"Has any misfortune—Oh, Jess! speak, speak!"

"No, honey, no misfortin—leastways, no misfortin what your coming in time won't 'vent and make all right."

Gertrude lifted her head and looked in the face of the old woman who was standing before her.

"'No misfortune but what my coming in time will not prevent?' Oh! I know now what it is. I almost feared it! My husband, thinking me dead—is about to marry—marry—"

Here her voice broke down, her head fell upon her open hands, and she sobbed aloud.

"Now, honey, don t, don't, don't take on so! 'Member, I warned you last night, no matter *what* you might hear, not to doubt Marse Gerald's love. 'Cause he love you, honey! he do, indeed!" pleaded the old nurse, laying her motherly hands caressingly on the bowed and grieved young head.

"I know it, Jess. I never could doubt his love; but oh! he loves me as one passed away from the earth, and he is about to marry another! My own husband! My own husband! for whom I would have died!"

Her voice again broke down in sobs, and her frame shook with emotion as a reed in a storm.

"Now, don't, honey; don't! You has come in good time to 'vent it all, and to t'row confusion on de face of an artful 'oman as has worked on de feelings of a noble ge'm'an, till she's 'duced him to 'gage hisself to marry her. All her fau't, honey. 'Tended to go into a 'sumption and all that. And muteral friends — meddlesome idiwuts what ought to be locked up in a 'Sane 'Sylum—a dinging it into his head all de time as she was a dying for him! Now what could a ge'm'an do, when a young 'oman heave herse'f right at his head dat way, dough his own heart ain't in it?"

Gertrude made no reply. She was still weeping.

"No, honey, his heart ain't in it! His heart true to

you, honey, t'rough all! You see I must 'fend Marse Gerald when he ain't here to speak for hisse'f."

"Oh, Jess, he does not need any defence. I *know* that he is the soul of truth and honour. No one could ever doubt that. But — but the very thought of his marrying another!"

Again she broke down in wild weeping.

"I tell you, honey, if you'd seen how gashly pale he was when he come over here las' Friday, de fus', you'd know how it was. It was her fau't. She was 'termined to have him. What de ole saying say?

"'Ef a 'oman *will*, she *won't*,
You may depend on't;
And ef she *won't*, she *will*,
And dere's an end on't!'

Heap o' sense in dese ole sayings, honey, and de longer yer lib de more you'll find it so. *I* has!"

Gertrude did not answer. She was sobbing as if her heart would break.

Poor Jess continued her efforts to soothe and comfort the stricken young creature, and was partly successful.

When Gertrude's storm of emotion had somewhat subsided, she dried her tears, and with a deep drawn breath turned to her old nurse and asked:

"Did Colonel Fitzgerald come from Wendover to be married, Jess?"

"Yes, honey; and he looked as if he had come to be exercooted. But he ain't married yit, honey! I'd take my afterdavit to dat!"

"How soon was it to be, Jess?"

"Well, honey, I don't dezactly know," answered Jess. ("Dat ain't no false, for I dunno de zact hour,") she mentally added.

The sound of the wheels was heard, and Jess took advantage of the circumstance to make her escape from further troublesome questionings by running to the door.

"Here come de gig now!" she exclaimed; "and thank de dear Lord, here come Dr. Goodwin hisself along o' John Brooks, to take all de heavy 'sponsibility offen my poor ole shoulders."

"Dr. Goodwin!" cried Gertrude, starting up; "oh, that is very, very kind!"

In another moment the venerable rector of Red Sandstone Church rushed into the room in an unusual state of excitement, and seeing Gertrude, without a word of ordinary greeting, which under the circumstances of her return, seemed very strange, vehemently exclaimed:

"Get on your bonnet and cloak at once, my child. We have not a moment to lose in ceremony. Jess, get them for your mistress instantly, and move quicker than you ever did in your life before."

Old Jessie, propelled by the speaker's impetuosity, shot off in search of the requested articles, and soon returned with Gertrude's sealskin sack and hat, and her veil and gloves.

The little lady, moved by the same unexplained excitement on the part of the grave old minister, hastily put them all on, and then gave him her hand.

He hurried her out of the house, and put her into the carriage, for he had brought his brougham instead of his gig.

"Now, Boykins, drive as for life to St. Patrick's Chapel. Don't spare horseflesh! We must get there before twelve o'clock if it kill the horse," he exclaimed to his old coachman, as he took his seat beside Gertrude.

Boykins cracked his whip and started his horse at a break-neck speed, which caused that clerical animal to lay back his ears and pop out his eyes in astonishment at this unseemly departure from the grave old parson's usually sober pace.

Up to this time not a word had been uttered by Gertrude. She had been caught up and carried away as by a whirlwind.

Now, however, as soon as she could recover her breath and her faculties, she said:

"Dear Dr. Goodwin, I am so glad to see you. It was very kind in you to come to me. I thank you with all my heart."

"I am only doing my bounden duty by you and others, my dear," briefly responded the rector.

"But—please, Dr. Goodwin, why are we going to St. Patrick's Church, rather than to the Summit?"

"To prevent a profanation of the Lord's altar and the marriage rites."

Gertrude understood him, and sank back in her seat, murmuring:

"So soon—to-day! Oh, Gerald!"

"But, my dear child, we have no time to talk now. Boykins—faster!" said the rector, impatiently.

And indeed, after this, there was no chance to converse; for at the speed at which they were going the little carriage rattled so ruggedly over the rocky road leading up the river, that words would have been drowned in the noise of the wheels.

Gertrude leaned back in her seat, white as death, faint to the verge of swooning, yet trying earnestly to keep up her courage and strength, by saying to herself:

"Gerald loves me! I know he will be rejoiced to see me. And, though there must be surprise and confusion if we interrupt the marriage at the altar, yet no one need be humiliated, not even the expectant bride; for no one will be to blame, not even Miss Fitzgerald, for believing Gerald to be a widower, who was once her own betrothed, it was natural enough that she should wish to marry him. She is not to be held responsible. All honest people must understand this is a mistake, providentially prevented from being a fatal one by my timely return."

While Gertrude was mentally saying these things to herself the carriage turned to the left, and leaving the river bank, entered a forest road that soon led them to a glade, in the midst of which stood the old colonial church of St. Patrick's with its dark red walls half-covered with ivy, and its gilded cross at the top of its steeple glittering in the beams of the vertical sun.

It was a busy scene. The glade was half filled with carriages and horses of every description, and grooms and coachmen of every size and every shade of colour.

Nearest the church door waited the handsome travelling carriage of Colonel Fitzgerald, drawn by a fine pair of bay horses. On the box sat his old coachman, Hannibal, and loitering near was his young groom, Jubal.

Gertrude had never seen this superb equipage before, but she recognized it, not only by the crest of the Fitzgeralds painted on its panels, but by the servants in attendance upon it.

This carriage was evidently waiting for the bride elect,

and the bridegroom expectant, for Geraldine and Gerald Fitzgerald, to take them to the bridal banquet, or on their wedding tour.

Gertrude drew her veil over her face lest any one should recognize her prematurely, and create an excitement.

"That is right, my dear. We do not wish to make a scene. We must create a confusion, of course, but we must do it as quietly as possible," said Dr. Goodwin, as he signed to his coachman to draw up the carriage under a certain tree, and then alighted and handed Gertrude out.

"You are trembling excessively, my poor child," said the old man, as he drew her arm within his own; "but brace up! You have right on your side."

And with that he led her into the church.

They were stopped in the very vestibule by one of the ushers, who inquired:

"Have you a card, sir?" And adding: "No one can be admitted to these ceremonies without such a passport."

"I have my passport on my arm, sir," replied the old rector, as with grave dignity he put aside the usher and led his companion into the church.

The interior of the building was crowded with a brilliant wedding company, all invited guests. Every seat was filled, but fortunately the aisles were all kept clear by the vigilance of the ushers, and afforded an unobstructed view of the altar, which was decorated profusely with flowers and illuminated brilliantly with wax candles. Yet no priest or other servant of the altar appeared, no bride or bridegroom was visible.

"Good heaven! Are we too late to stop the ceremony?" thought the worthy rector to himself, as he paused in dismay, with Gertrude on his arm. Then, unable to bear the agony of suspense for an instant, he stooped and whispered to a gentleman seated in a pew at his right:

"Pray, sir, is the marriage ceremony over yet?"

"No, sir; it has not commenced. The bridegroom has just come. They are waiting for the bride, I believe. She is expected every instant."

"Oh, thank you for the information. Where, then, is the bridegroom?"

"He passed up the main aisle here about ten minutes ago. I do not see him now. But I suppose he is up near the altar somewhere."

"Thank Heaven, we are yet in time!" fervently said Doctor Goodwin to himself, as he drew the trembling hand of his young companion more firmly under his arm, and led her up the middle aisle, between the crowded pews.

Glancing right and left, he recognized many friends and acquaintance, and several members of his own congregation, all of whom bowed to him, wondering what closely-veiled young lady was she, whom he supported.

Gertrude, in her dark brown cashmere suit, sealskin jacket and hat, and close brown veil, passed unrecognized by any.

On reaching the space in front of the sacred chancel, Dr. Goodwin glanced right and left in search of the bridegroom expectant and his party. He saw them standing together on the right of the middle aisle—Gerald Fitzgerald and the two young officers of his regiment acting as his groomsmen.

Fitzgerald wore the uniform of a colonel of cavalry, which set off his stately form and noble face to the greatest advantage; but his face was pale, thin, and haggard, as with great bodily and mental suffering, and in contrast to his jet black hair and full black beard, looked almost ghastly.

His young attendants wore the uniforms of lieutenants of cavalry, and looked well.

On the instant of catching sight of this party, Dr. Goodwin had adroitly turned his young protégée to the left before Fitzgerald could see *him*, and before Gertrude, through her thick veil, and in the *clare-obscure* of the old church, could catch even a dim glimpse of her husband.

On the left of the chancel there was a little white door that led into the priest's robing-room. To this door Dr. Goodwin led Gertrude, and feeling that the intrusion was quite justified by the circumstances, he knocked and then entered the room.

It was occupied by two persons — the bishop of the diocese, who had come to St. Patrick's for the express

purpose of performing this ceremony, and, Father Dubarry, the regular pastor of the parish.

The bishop was already arrayed in his magnificent robes, and looked up in some surprise at the entrance of the strangers; but Father Dubarry, who had not yet assumed his own, and still wore only the long, close-fitting black frock coat of his order, came forward courteously to welcome Dr. Goodwin, whom he was in the frequent habit of meeting amicably at the houses of their mutual friends.

Dr. Goodwin bowed to the two priests and began to say:

"I fear, sirs, that my entrance here at this moment must seem an unwarrantable intrusion, but—"

"No, no," interrupted the amiable Father Dubarry. "Certainly not, if you have business with us, Dr. Goodwin—"

"My justification is *here*," continued the rector, raising the veil of the lady on his arm and handing her forward, so that she stood immediately in front of the pastor of St. Patrick's.

As if he had suddenly been struck in the face, Father Dubarry reeled backwards until he reached the wall, where he stopped and stood aghast, with his eyes fixed wildly on the face of Gertrude.

The bishop stared from one to the other of the three persons, as if demanding an explanation of this strange scene.

"Colonel Fitzgerald's lost wife!" faintly muttered the astonished priest, without changing his position or withdrawing his eyes from their fixed gaze upon Gertrude's face.

"Fitzgerald's wife, who was never lost, but was rescued from the sea and taken all around the world by the ship that saved her, and has only just returned in time to prevent a sacrilege," replied Dr. Goodwin, who then led his agitated companion to a short sofa that stood in the room, and placed her on it.

"Saints in heaven, then! this marriage will have to be stopped!" exclaimed Father Dubarry, beginning to find his voice.

"Of course it will," coolly assented Dr. Goodwin.

"What is all this about?" inquired the bishop, no longer able to control his impatience.

Dr. Goodwin and Father Dubarry, both speaking together, quickly explained.

Just at that moment some little stir was heard in the church without. The organ struck up the grand wedding march of Mendelssohn.

"That means that the bride-elect and her attendants are now entering the church. Oh, what is to be done to prevent a confusion?" helplessly inquired Father Dubarry.

"Permit me to suggest," said the bishop, who was now the only cool member of the party. "Let the pastor of the parish go out at once to meet the bride, tell her that something has occurred which shall be explained to her, then take her out to her carriage and break the news as tenderly as possible. Let Dr. Goodwin go out and whisper to Colonel Fitzgerald that he is wanted in here. And in the meanwhile I will go out and announce from the chancel that an unforseen event has arrested the wedding ceremonies, and then give the benediction and dismiss the congregation. Thus all unseemly disturbance in the house of the Lord will be prevented. The congregation, however disappointed and perplexed they may he, will retire quietly. Colonel Fitzgerald will meet his new found wife in this room, and after the crowd shall have dispersed, will take her home. The community will soon have their curiosity satisfied by learning the real state of affairs."

The plan proposed by the bishop was at once approved and adopted.

Father Dubarry first left the vestry, to go and meet the bridal procession.

As he passed out, Dr. Goodwin, through the open door, had a full view of the advancing bride-elect and her attendants.

Geraldine Fitzgerald came first, leaning on the arm of her late guardian, Royal Greenleaf, who was to enact the role of "father" in this pageant, and to give the bride away. Geraldine was magnificently arrayed in a bridal dress of white Genoese velvet, trained, trimmed with swan's-down, and open over a skirt of rich white satin, with deep point lace flounces. A wreath of orange

blossoms crowned her raven black hair, and a veil of cardinal point lace fell from her head and over her whole costume, like a fine mist.

Leaning on the arm of her escort, followed by her train of white-robed bridesmaids, and heralded by music, she advanced up the middle aisle with a haughty air, her very step seeming to spurn the floor.

"Ah, proud beauty! The hour of your humiliation is at hand!" thought the rector, as he saw Father Dubarry meet her and whisper a few earnest words in her ear, and noted her look of haughty astonishment as he resolutely turned the bridal procession about and marched them out of the church—followed by the wondering eyes of all the congregation. Some messenger sent to the organist at this moment stopped the music.

This was the signal for Dr. Goodwin's entrance upon the scene. Stooping to Gertrude he whispered:

"Be calm and firm, my child. All will be done in good order, and all will be well."

Then he passed out of the vestry into the church and stepped silently to the spot where Gerald Fitzgerald stood, attended by his groomsmen.

"Good-morning, Colonel Fitzgerald," he said, in a very low tone.

"Good-morning, sir," responded Fitzgerald, in the same subdued key. "Can you tell what is the cause of this very irregular proceeding? Why has Father Dubarry withdrawn Miss Fitzgerald from the church?"

"Come with me and I will explain, Colonel," whispered Dr. Goodwin, taking his arm and leading him quietly across to the opposite corner of the chancel, near the door of the vestry, watched by the eyes of all the company, every one of whom was silently wondering what in the world was the matter.

"Colonel Fitzgerald," began the rector, in a low voice, though they were now out of the hearing of others, "we were obliged to stop the proceedings, and do it as quietly and decently as circumstances would permit."

"But why? What has happened? A death?" inquired the surprised and perplexed hearer.

"No. Now, Colonel Fitzgerald, summon your self-control. You have a great deal, I know, and you will

need it all. And don't exclaim; don't do anything to draw attention."

"Speak out, sir, in the name of Heaven! Tell me your worst news at once," breathed Fitzgerald, with suppressed vehemence.

"There is no bad news. I am sure that you will hail it as the best news you could hear in this world, coming even as it does now to break up the 'goodly company.'"

"Well?"

"Gerald, give me your hand," and he took it and held it firmly; "Gerald, don't cry out. The news is of your wife."

"Gertrude! Great Heaven!" uttered Fitzgerald, under his breath, while every vestige of colour fled from his face, and his dark eyes dilated and started as they stared at the speaker. Sudden hope rising out of dull despair is so like terror in its manifestations, while there is still uncertainty in it, because it is largely mixed with terror, lest the good news should prove false.

"There is reason to believe that she lives," whispered Dr. Goodwin.

"Gertrude lives! Oh, man, do you know what you say? I saw her, wretch that I was! I saw her go down beneath the waves! And Geraldine saw her—saw that—her head had been crushed by a chance blow from a tossing plank. Oh, Heaven!" And here Fitzgerald moaned and covered his face with his hand.

"*Miss Fitzgerald saw nothing of the sort*," said the rector, in a low, stern voice. "Your wife was rescued, uninjured, the moment after you saw her sink. She has been carried nearly all around the world since by the ship that saved her—"

"Stop, for Heaven's sake, stop, and tell me one thing before you go farther," muttered Fitzgerald in extreme agitation. "*Do you know this to be true?*"

"I know it to be true, but I do not yet know the details. I know that she was alive and in San Francisco five months ago; and I have every reason to believe that she is alive and well at this moment. But sit down and compose yourself for two minutes. Here is the bishop," said Dr. Goodwin, as he seated himself on a corner bench and drew Fitzgerald down to his side.

The bishop entered the chancel and spread out his hands. The congregation, whose curiosity and impatience had broken out into a low buzz of voices, became suddenly silent and expectant.

"My friends," said the bishop, "I have to announce to you that an unlooked-for event—not of a calamitous nature, however—has made it necessary to arrest these wedding ceremonies that you came here to witness. And I have to ask you, after the benediction, to withdraw quietly to your own homes, where in due time you will hear more."

And again the bishop spread his hands, and when the people bowed their heads, gave them his benediction.

They then began to leave the church, all the more willingly that they could discuss the mystery more freely on the outside.

Gerald Fitzgerald turned in fierce impatience to his companion.

"You said my wife was alive and well five months ago. Where is she now? In the name of mercy, speak!"

"Fitzgerald, she is not far off. She is here, waiting for you, and terribly afraid, poor child, that her coming at such an inopportune moment should have annoyed and disturbed you so as to spoil all the pleasure you would otherwise have in receiving her."

"Where is she? Where? Let me go to her at once."

"Do you see that door in the corner? You know it leads into the robing room. She is there. Go to her."

CHAPTER XX.

UNITED.

MEANWHILE Gertrude sat alone on the little sofa, with her elbow resting on its corner and her head bowed upon her hand, hoping, fearing, trembling, almost dying of anxiety lest even now something should happen to snatch her husband away from her again, as had so often happened before when she had believed herself certainly just upon the point of meeting him; or that some distressing scene should occur in the church; or that Gerald Fitzgerald himself should feel so humiliated and overwhelmed by such a public interruption of the wedding rites as to be utterly incapable, or most unwilling, to see her yet.

This last thought was anguish.

"Oh!" she aspirated from the depths of her heart, earnestly clasping her little hands together, "Oh! I hope, I pray Gerald may not feel so towards me!"

The door opened and closed very quietly.

With her hands still tightly clasped in silent prayers, she lifted up her eyes and saw—

Her husband coming towards her with outstretched arms, and face beaming with earnest love and joy. At last! at last! they had met!

Trembling she tried to utter his name, but her voice faltered and died in silence. She arose to greet him, but must instantly have fallen to the floor had he not sprung forward and caught her in his arms. He folded her to his bosom in a long and close embrace.

Then he gently placed her on the sofa, and sat down, and once more drew her head upon his breast. But for some moments not a word was breathed between them. Their hearts were too full for utterance.

Gerald was the first to break the spell of silence. In a voice shaken by emotion he whispered:

"Gertrude! my Gertrude raised to life! Oh, what must you think, on coming back, to find me here on such an errand as brought me? I cannot name it!"

"Gerald, I understand it all, and I think no wrong of you now, or ever. Ah, how could I *doubt* you when I *know* you so well? I love you as perfectly as I know you love me. I trust you utterly, and I am happy. Oh, so happy!" she breathed, clasping her arms more closely about him, and pressing her face to his bosom.

"'So happy!' Then, my precious one, has the last little cloud over our sunrise of joy vanished forever! 'So happy' are you, little angel? And I? O, my Gertrude, this is the most blessed day of my life. Heaven itself can have no joy in the future for me to surpass the joy of this hour. Let me gaze in your eyes once more, my love; your sweet eyes lost to me so long!"

And he lifted up her head, and holding it between the palm of his hands, he gazed down on her for some minutes, growing graver and sadder in his look, until at length he murmured tenderly:

"Oh, how you must have suffered, my child! Your little pale, thin face, your sweet brown eyes, tell me too surely how much you must have suffered!"

"Only because I was away from you, who are my life and health, Gerald. Now that I am with you, never more to part, I shall grow well and bright," she answered.

"Heaven grant that you may, my most precious child!"

"And you, Gerald. You have suffered, too. You look haggard and old, and see, here are some silver hairs in your raven locks. Ah! we must never part again, Gerald. No, not for a week. Ah! how can a husband and wife who love each other, ever part for any cause but the call of the most imperative duty. We will never part again, Gerald, will we?"

"Never! heart of my heart! I swear it to you, I will never be divided from you again!"

"Not even if you were to be ordered again to that savage Indian country, so full of hardships and privations and perils, would you leave me behind, Gerald?"

"No, darling—never! never! I should either resign my commission, and stay with you, or if honour compelled me to go, I should take you with me, knowing well that no hardships of camp life on the frontier could equal to you the hardship of absence from me. My darling, your little, worn face tells me that, too; for oh! what traces of suffering it bears!" he murmured, as he pressed his lips on her pale forehead.

"Your kiss will erase all traces of suffering from my brow, Gerald, even as your love will efface the suffering itself from my heart. This hour comforts me for all, it is so full of deep joy!" she murmured, with her head now pillowed on his breast.

How long they might have remained thus forgetful, in this hour of reunion, of all others except themselves, is uncertain, had not a discreet rap at the room door recalled them to a recognition of the outer world. Gertrude lifted her head from its resting place, and Gerald gently put her aside and went and opened the door.

The Rev. Dr. Goodwin stood there. Behind him the church seemed vacant.

"I am sorry to disturb you, my dear Colonel, but you forget how time flies. The bishop has been patiently waiting to change his vestments for the last hour," said the good rector.

"I beg ten thousand pardons!" exclaimed Fitzgerald.

"Not one pardon is needed, because there has been no offence."

"Is my carriage still waiting?" inquired Gerald.

"Certainly. It would not be likely to drive off without you."

"Then I will take Mrs. Fitzgerald out. Stay—is there a crowd outside?"

"No, not a soul, but your own servants and mine! Everybody else has left the premises, luckily without the faintest idea that you were left behind in the church, or that Mrs. Fitzgerald is with you! A suspicion of that sort, you know, would have kept them waiting until night, or all night, to see you pass. Happily they had no such idea; but from their conversation they all seemed to be much disgusted at having missed the grand wedding that they came to witness, and very much more perplexed indeed as to whose sudden death

and funeral had so inopportunely interrupted the proceedings! But come, my dear Fitzgerald, your carriage waits."

"One moment," said Gerald, and he retreated into the robing room, took the hand of Gertrude, drew it under his arm, and led her out.

"It is quite a remarkable coincidence, Dr. Goodwin, that you, who first so suddenly joined our hands in marriage, should now as suddenly reunite us," said Fitzgerald, as he stood for a moment, with Gertrude on his arm.

"Yes!" exclaimed the old clergyman, briskly, "so it is! —though I never once thought of it!—I wish you both much joy! God bless you!"

"Amen," devoutly responded Gerald.

"Thanks, dear Dr. Goodwin," added Gertrude.

"But tell me, by the way, what has become of my two young officers? I had forgotten the existence of the boys until this instant!" said Fitzgerald, as the three walked down the middle aisle.

"Oh, I gave them a hint of the situation, turned them over to hospitable Royal Greenleaf, and sent them to Greenwood, in attendance upon the two pretty bridesmaids, Patricia Fitzgerald and Horatia Rowley," replied Dr. Goodwin, in a low voice.

The party then passed out of the church together by the middle door, before which now stood the superb travelling carriage, with its splendid span of bay horses, and its liveried servants, all got up expressly to grace the wedding pageant of Geraldine Fitzgerald; but now destined to wait the pleasure of our little lady.

As they stepped from the vestibule, Gertrude's eyes encountered those of Jubal, the especial attendant of her husband, who had travelled with them during their long tour of the Eastern Hemisphere, and whose shining black visage was now perfectly radiant with wonder and delight in beholding again the face of his recovered mistress.

Gertrude, with her all-embracing goodness, went to him at once, holding out her hand and saying, with a smile:

"You see, I have come to life again, Jubal!"

"Yes, Mist'ess, thanks be to de Lord and all his good

angels, as you is!" cried the boy, grasping her offered hand in both of his and shedding tears of joy over it.

Then Gertrude greeted Hannibal, the smiling old coachman, and Boykins, the servant of Dr. Goodwin, who had driven her to church, but whom in her haste she had had no time to speak to until now.

"Come, my good little girl; it is getting late in the afternoon, and we have but a short time to reach home by daylight," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he took her hand and placed her in the carriage.

Then, turning to the rector, he courteously said:

"Dr. Goodwin, will you not enter and give us your company this evening?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Fitzgerald. There! bid me good-by, and I will jog home behind my old horse," replied the rector, laughing, as he shook hands with Gertrude and Gerald, and then lifting his hat as a final adieu, he went and got in his own vehicle and drove off.

"To Haddon's Ferry," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he entered the carriage and took his place beside his wife.

Jubal closed the carriage door, gave the order to the coachman and sprang up to his place behind.

"We are to take Haddon's Ferry on our way home?" said Gertrude, as the carriage left the churchyard, and took the forest road leading down to the river banks.

"Yes, we must take the ferry on our way," answered Fitzgerald.

"I am so glad. I would like to see old Jess again, and bid her good-by before we go farther," she added.

"We shall go no farther to-night. You are much too tired to do so, my poor, little weary dove. We must sleep in your own sweet old home to-night."

"Oh, Gerald, I shall like that so much!"

"I know how peaceful and restful the place is, for I have slept there very lately, little wife."

"Yes, Gerald, I know. Jess told me."

"You have seen her then already?"

"Oh, yes. I reached the ferry last night. Jess took me for a ghost."

"No wonder, my little pale love. But you have much to tell me, Gertrude."

"Oh, so much, Gerald—

'Of moving accidents by field and flood,
Of hair-breadth 'scapes,'

You will think me another Gulliver!"

"My poor little, storm-beaten bird!" murmured Fitzgerald, tenderly, gathering her to his bosom.

"But I have found my nest now, Gerald, and I am happy!—so happy!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"HOME, SWEET HOME!"

THE short February afternoon had closed in; the sun had set behind Catamount Cliffs, and twilight was gathering darkly over forest, mountain and river, when the Fitzgeralds' travelling carriage drew up before the gate at Haddon's Ferry House.

Old Jess, attracted by the sound of wheels, sprang up from her seat before the kitchen fire, and ran to the front door and opened it, just as Jubal, who stood there, was about to knock for admittance.

"Well, Aunt Jess, de weddin'ers hab come here; but it ain't Queen Ger'ldine! It's our own dear little lady!" whispered Jubal.

"I knowed it! I knowed I'd sarcumwent dat glitterin' sea-sarpint ef I only got up airly enough in de mornin'! What de ole sayin' say? Lors! I'm so overjoyed I forget what de ole saying *do* say about dis. But I know it's somefin mighty sensible. Heap o' sense in dem ole sayin's!" exclaimed Jess, as she hastily smoothed down her apron, and ran out to receive her master and mistress, who had left the carriage and were now coming up the garden walk.

"Welcome home, Marse Gerald! Welcome home, Miss Gertrude! I'm oberjoyed dis day. I thank my 'Vine Marster as I hab lib to see it. Now, Lord, let dy

servant part in peace. I's willin' to go now. Yes, I's willin' to go!" cried Jess.

"Oh, no, nurse, don't say that! You must stay here many years longer if it should please the Lord! We cannot spare you yet," said Gertrude, affectionately.

"Ah, chile, it will hab to be dough! 'De ole *may* die, but de young *must*,' as de ole saying say. Heap o' sense in dese ole sayin's, honey."

"You did not expect to see us this evening, however, did you? And you are not prepared for us, are you, Jess?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Didn't I 'spect you, dough? And ain't I 'pared for you needer? You'll see," said Jess, as she proudly led the way into the house and opened the door on the right, admitting them into the spacious low-ceiled parlour, where a bright wood-fire burned in the fire-place, and a neat table was set for supper.

"Oh, dear Jess, this is all so nice and comfortable! How did you know we were going to stop here?" inquired Gertrude, as she sank into her grandfather's restful old arm-chair.

"I didn't know it, honey! I didn't know you *was* comin' here for sartain; but I t'ought you *mought* come, and it wouldn't do no harm to 'pare for you! Now, dat's de trufe! I 'flected dat dis was right on your way to de Summit, and you *mought* stop an' eben feel too tired to go furder to-night! So arter you was gone, I 'pared for your supper and lodging bofe! 'Arter wit better'n 'fore wit,' as de ole sayin' say! Heap o' sense in dem ole sayin's, honey; now I tell you all good and you'd better believe it! Would you like to go to your room before supper, young mist'ess?"

"No, I thank you, Jess, there was no dust, so I do not need to go. I will lay off my hat and my sack, both, Jess, and you may bring in the supper at once, if it is ready, for I know that Colonel Fitzgerald cannot have broken his fast since morning," said the little lady, with a thoughtful glance towards her husband.

"Well, bress de Lord, ef I ain't glad to hear dat! for I's 'pared a supper hard to beat in Wilde county, and I's glad it's likely to be eaten! for ef dere's one thing more aggrawoking to a cook dan anuder, it's to 'pare a splendid meal o' wittles and den not have it eaten! Hasn't broke

his fas' since dis mornin', hain't he? Well, den, he can break it now, honey, you bet; and smash it all to pieces too!" exclaimed Jess, as she went into the kitchen to serve the supper.

At this moment, Jubal made his appearance to inquire whether the carriage was to wait.

"No. Take it home to the Summit. We shall remain here to-night; but bring it back for us to-morrow morning. And by the way, tell the women there that their mistress and myself expect to be home by noon, and that they are to have everything in readiness for us," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

Jubal bowed and left the house, and was replaced by John Brooks, who came in to offer his dutiful welcome to his young mistress.

Gertrude received him with frank pleasure and great kindness. And John Brooks would have lingered longer for the delight of looking at her, had not Jessie sharply recalled him to himself by ordering him to come and help her to bring in the supper.

In a few minutes the first course of a repast was placed upon the table that might have done honour to Soyer.

There were trout caught from the mountain streams thus early in the season; there was venison-steak on chafing dishes, with currant jelly; there was roast pheasant; there were several varieties of home-made bread, cakes, custards, jellies, creams and so forth, besides delicious tea and coffee.

To Jess's great delight her young master and mistress did full justice to the sweet well-prepared delicacies which she had carefully made for them. They lingered long over their evening meal.

After it was over and Jess had cleared the table, and John had replenished the fire and both had left the young pair to themselves, Gerald and Gertrude drew their chairs to the hearth—Gerald occupying old Gabriel Haddon's seat and Gertrude a lower one by his side, that enabled her to lay her head on his knee while she told him the story of her first rescue by Sallust Rowley; her shelter in the fisherman's cottage; her frequent trials and disappointments in her endeavours to rejoin her husband; her disastrous voyage in the ill-fated

Zanzibar; her second shipwreck on the island of ice; her second rescue by the captain of the *Becky;* her long voyage around Cape Horn to San Francisco; and, finally, her return six-month's trip and her quick journey home.

She omitted nothing from her narrative; for the frequent and careful questioning of Colonel Fitzgerald prevented her from overlooking or forgetting any circumstance worth mentioning.

"Our thanks are first of all due to Heaven. After that we owe a debt of gratitude so great to two men, that we can scarcely ever hope to repay it, Gertrude. I shall seek out Sallust Rowley to-morrow, and I shall write to Captain Wailes. I hope to shake his manly hand some day," said Colonel Gerald Fitzgerald, with much feeling and great emotion.

They remained some time longer sitting before the pleasant wood fire conversing on the incidents of that dreary year of absence which had divided them, and forgetful of the passing time, until the coals burned low and the room grew chilly, when Colonel Gerald Fitzgerald glanced up at the old clock and saw with great surprise that it was two in the morning.

Then they retired to their own room, where the fire of hard, aromatic cedar was still burning brightly, and where all things were carefully arranged for their convenience and comfort.

The dawn was just beginning to creep through the ivy-clad windows when Gertrude was awakened by an old familiar cry, peculiar to the place:

"Boat!"

It seemed to be no particular concern of hers now; so, being still very tired, she turned over and addressed herself to sleep again.

The god of day had risen and was glistening through the evergreen leaves upon the outside of the window, when she was awakened again by a soft knocking at her chamber door.

"Who is there?" inquired Gertrude, in a very low and feeble voice.

"It's me, honey,—Aunt Jess. Oh! do please wake Marse Gerald and ax him to dress hisself and come out here," cried Jess.

"What is the matter?" inquired Gerald Fitzgerald, who had been roused by the noise.

"Oh, Marse Gerald, sir, a man has been hurt t'other side o' de ferry! An ole gem'an, sir. And me and John Brooks don't know what to do about it. Please dress yourself, Marse Gerald, and come and see about it," exclaimed Aunt Jess.

"I will be with you in five minutes," replied Colonel Fitzgerald, who, with military promptitude, arose and put on his clothes.

"Oh, who can it be, Gerald? I hope the poor old man is not fatally hurt," said Gertrude.

"Dear child, you know how easily these simple servants of ours are frightened, and how readily they exaggerate. This is most probably nothing serious. However, I shall soon ascertain. In the meantime don't alarm yourself," said Gerald, as he stooped and kissed her and left the room on his errand of mercy.

In the hall below he found John Brooks waiting, with ashen cheeks and trembling limbs.

"What is all this about, Brooks?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"It's a murder, sir!" exclaimed the old boatman, with chattering teeth.

"A WHAT?" demanded Colonel Fitzgerald, doubting the evidence of his own senses.

"A murder, sir! A hominyside, Lord save us! It is on the other shore, sir, and the boat is ready to take you over. Will you go now, sir?"

"Yes, certainly; lead the way," answered Colonel Fitzgerald, as he prepared himself to follow John Brooks, the old boatman.

"This path, sir. It is the little boat we go by," said John Brooks, as he hastened down a narrow path leading to the sands, where the *Water Lily* lay waiting to receive her freight.

When they were both seated in the boat, and John Brooks was briskly plying the oars, Colonel Fitzgerald said:

"Now tell me all about this supposed foul murder, John Brooks. How did you discover it? Tell me all about it."

"Yes, sir. Well, marster, 'bout an hour ago, jes' at day-light, I was roused up out'n my sleep by de cry for de boat, which is very uncommon at dat uncivilized hour, sir, you see."

"Is it? But go on."

"So much so, sir, dat it flustered me, and made me shakey like, 'specially as de woice from de order side kept on, 'stracting my mind by screaming:

'BOAT!'"

"Yes. Go on."

"I hurried on my duds, sir, as fast as eber I could, and run down to the boat-house, and took de horn and yelled back ag'in—'Comin'!' But you see, sir, de boat being swung up in de boat-house, it took some time to get it down. Howeber, de party on t'other side had stopped yelling, which sort of quieted me down, too. So—"

"Be brief—be brief, John!"

"Yes, sir. Well, sir, jes' as I had pushed off de boat, I saw de horridest creetur I eber saw in my life. It gave an Injun's war-whoop, and den a groan."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Colonel Fitzgerald, impatiently.

"Well, marster, I ain't no coward, but it struck sich a numbness ober me as I could hardly handle an oar. But, arter a bit, as I didn't hear no more, for dere was a dead silence, I plucked up a spirit and I rowed with a will. And, sir, when I got to the other side, it was jus' light enough for me to see a tall, wild-looking creeter spring up from under de ole hemlock tree, and rush crashing through de thicket, and gone!"

"Man or woman?" hastily inquired Fitzgerald.

"'Oman, sir; if 'twasn't de debil, as I 'spects it was, arter all."

"Well, well?"

"Yes, sir; I pushed de boat up on de sands, sir, and jumped out and looked around, and dere underneaf of dat same ole hemlock tree, where de 'oman sprung up and run away, I see a sight wat fetch all de numbness ober me ag'in, so I felt like I should drap down dead myself!"

Colonel Fitzgerald turned and looked at the speaker intently, almost sternly.

The man continued:

"Marster, it was a great, tall, strong man, lying over on his face, with his arms flung out, and a long knife sticking between his shoulders."

"Stabbed in the back!" exclaimed Fitzgerald.

"Yes, sir."

"Row quickly, John! And go on with what you were saying."

"Well, marster, fust I was so scared I couldn't do nothing but stand and stare; but when the man moved and groaned I took heart, and went to help him; and I pulled out the knife from his back; but, sir, I had to pull so hard that when it came out at last I fell backwards to de ground. But I soon got up and went to the man, and found the blood oozing through his clothes. I was afraid to turn him over, for fear he would bleed to death, so I enlarged the hole the knife had gone through in his garment, and then I wet my handkercher in de cold water ob de riber and folded it and put it ober de wound, and put a little flat stone on it to press it dere and keep dere while I come to the ferry-house for 'sistance. It was de bes' I could do, marster, under de circumstances," added John Brooks, the boatman, apologetically.

"It was all you could do, I think," replied Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Den I come ober to de ferry-house, quicker'n eber I did before in my life. And I tole ole Aunt Jess, and sent her up to de mist'ess to ax her to tell you. Dat's all, master, and here we is at de landin', and dere, under de ole hemlock, is de wounded man, as has not stirred since I left him dere. Dat I can see," concluded John Brooks, as he drew in his oars, laying one down in the bottom of the boat, and using the other as a pole, pushed the *Water Lily* up high and dry on the sands.

Gerald Fitzgerald sprang out and hastened to the old giant hemlock, at the foot of which lay, face downwards, the form of a tall, dark man, in whose swarthy Roman features and wild growth of unkempt hair and beard, "coal black and grizzled here and there," he recognized the mysterious pariah, Adam Lackland, for whom they had been advertising and searching so long and hopelessly!

A half-suppressed cry of horror escaped him, as with

swift intuition he instantly connected the story of the gipsy, Clea Phara, with the statement made by John Brooks, and rushed to the conclusion that Adam Lackland had at last fallen a victim to the vengeance of the mad woman whom we have long known by the mistaken name of Magdala. Simultaneously with coming to this conviction, he knelt down beside the badly wounded man, the better to examine his condition.

Adam Lackland was still living, but apparently unconscious, or, at least, incapable of manifesting consciousness.

"Brooks! we must get him to the ferry-house and to bed. Then you must hasten to bring a physician. Here! lift him carefully by his lower limbs, while I raise his head and shoulders. We must keep his face still downwards, and keep the compress on his wound, lest it break out bleeding again. There, so."

And the master and servant then carefully lifted the wounded man and bore him to the boat, where Colonel Fitzgerald supported his head and shoulders on his own knees while he held the compress closely to the wound to prevent the continued flow of blood.

John Brooks laid himself to the oars and quickly pulled them across to the opposite side, where they saw the carriage and servants of Colonel Fitzgerald already arrived.

"That is most fortunate, for we shall need all their assistance here," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as soon as he turned and saw them.

At his signal they came down to the landing just as John Brooks had pushed the ferry-boat high and dry up on the sands.

"Hannibal, stay with the carriage. Jubal, go at once to the house and take a door off its hinges, fold a quilt and get a pillow, and bring them all down here as quickly as you can."

"Yes, sir."

"There 's a gem'an in de boat as is badly hurt," added John Brooks, compassionately, in explanation to the wondering boy, who lost no time in running off to do his errand.

Colonel Fitzgerald held the wounded man patiently and carefully until the return of Jubal, with the door on one shoulder, and the quilt and pillow over the other.

"You did not alarm Mrs. Fitzgerald, I hope," said the colonel, as the laden boy came up to him.

"No, sir. Young mist'ess knows all about it, dough, and she and Aunt Jess is 'parin' a bed downstairs, so as de wounded gem'an won't have to be toted up," replied Jubal.

"John Brooks, get out and assist that lad to prepare a litter, upon which we may take this poor fellow to the house," were the next words of Colonel Fitzgerald.

The man stepped out of the boat, folded the quilt and laid it on the door, beat up the pillow and placed it at the head, and then went to help his master to raise the injured man and lay him on the improvised "stretcher."

"Come here, Hannibal. Lend a hand. The horses will stand for a few moments. You must help to carry this poor fellow to the house," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

The old coachman left the carriage and came to render the required assistance; and the four men, Colonel Fitzgerald and his three servants, carefully lifted the litter and bore the wounded victim to the house.

There they were met by Gertrude and old Jess, who showed them into the left-hand front room on the ground floor, which had once been the sleeping-apartment of old Gabriel Haddon, and where the little lady and the old nurse had prepared a bed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET OUT.

"GOOD Heaven! It is Adam Lackland!" exclaimed Gertrude, when they had laid him on the bed, and she had seen his face and recognized it.

"Yes, it is Adam Lackland, your fellow-passenger on the ill-fated *Zanzibar*, my child," repeated Colonel Fitzgerald, in a low voice.

"Oh, poor man! Is he very seriously wounded?" she next inquired, her tender face quivering with compassion.

"We cannot tell yet, my child. I am about to send for a doctor," replied Colonel Fitzgerald. Then turning to Jubal, he said:

"Take a boat and start for Wildeville, and bring back Dr. Peter Shaw. Tell him the exigency of the case, and he will come at once!"

"Yes, sir," announced Jubal, as he hastened away to do his errand.

"Oh, who has done this, Gerald?" inquired Gertrude, who was still standing beside her husband at the bed, and bending compassionately over the wounded man. "Who has been so cruel and dastardly as to stab him from behind? Is it known?"

"No, love, it is not known."

"Is he fatally injured? Oh, Gerald, tell me!"

"I do not know as yet, dear; but I hope not."

"Can I do nothing for him, then? Oh, it is so dreadful to stand here inactive."

"Yes, Gertrude, you can perform a very important service—a service which may save his life," answered Colonel Fitzgerald, who still held his hand closely down on the linen compressed over the wound.

"What is it? what is it?" eagerly demanded Gertrude, excitedly.

"You can take my place here, and put your hand where mine now is, and keep it pressed upon this thick fold of linen over the wound to prevent it from bleeding any more until the arrival of the doctor. It may be hours before he comes, love; but you can be patient, I know," replied Gerald.

"Oh, yes, indeed, Gerald, I can—and glad to be of service!" she said, as she took his vacant place, and assumed his duties, by putting her hand firmly down on the compress to staunch the flow of blood.

"Now, then, Jess, is there any brandy in the house?' he inquired, turning to the old woman.

"Hy, Marse Gerald, you eber know dis house to be dout anyfing dat was wanted? Not much. I got dat same bottle o' brandy, old Marse Gab'el Hadd'n used to keep for 'tingencies."

"Very well; bring it here quickly, with a glass."

Jess hurried off to do her errand, and soon returned with the required articles.

Colonel Fitzgerald poured a little of the brandy into the wine-glass, and put it to the lips of the sinking man; but found he could not administer it in that way.

"Get me a teaspoon, Jess."

The woman brought the spoon, and Colonel Fitzgerald dipped it half-full from the glass, and gave the brandy to his patient, drop by drop. In that way the sufferer could swallow it.

While he was still engaged in this benevolent work, he was astonished to see Dr. Peter Shaw walk into the room. He had not expected to see him for at least three hours to come.

"Fitzgerald, what is this I hear from your man? A probable murder in our quiet neighbourhood?" inquired the doctor, in the low, deep tone of suppressed excitement.

"Yes, my dear Doctor, it is, I fear, too true. How relieved I feel that you have come so soon! How did it happen? You must have met Jubal?"

"I did. I had just come down to the landing on the other side, and was about to blow the horn for the boat, when I saw it coming. You see I was on my way to visit

Hill Top Hall, where I have half a dozen permanent patients among the old coloured people. Nothing particular! Nothing to prevent my giving my whole attention to this case at once," explained the doctor, as he laid down his hat, drew off his gloves and overcoat, and approached the bed on which the sufferer lay.

"My wife, Mrs. Fitzgerald, Dr. Shaw," said Colonel Fitzgerald, informally introducing the lady and the physician.

"Ah, yes! I had the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Fitzgerald when she was Miss Gertrude Haddon. And I have a greater pleasure now, my dear young lady, in congratulating you on your late wonderful escape from shipwreck, of which I have just heard," said the doctor.

"I thank you, sir," said Gertrude, as she arose and retired, leaving the doctor and her husband alone with the patient.

Old Jess had breakfast ready in the cosy parlour.

"Well, now, I hopes as you'll sit down and git somefin to eat. Here de pairtridges is briled to a turn, and de waffles buttered hot de same, likewise de coffee," said old Jess, as she met her mistress.

"No, no, Jess, I am not hungry; I would rather wait for Colonel Fitzgerald, who cannot leave the patient yet. Please put those things back to the fire to keep warm, Jess," said the little lady.

"To spile, you mean! that's what you mean! And you been up eber since six o'clock, and it's nine now!"

"Well, Jess, we will only have to wait half an hour, and half-past nine is not so very late for breakfast."

"Hear to you, Miss Gertrude! Half-past nine not late for breakfast. So much for trabelling in unchristian foreign parts. In ole Masse Gab'el Had'n's time we used to be up at five and breakfas' at six. Well. 'Dem as libs mos' sees longest,' and 'New manners, new men,' as de ole sayings says! Heap o' sense in dem ole sayings, and de longer I libs the more I see it," said Jess, as she retired to her kitchen, taking the tray with the dishes to be kept hot. Gertrude sat down before the fire to await the issue of events.

In a few moments, however, Gerald Fitzgerald entered the room, saying:

"I am not wanted at the patient's bedside, Gertrude,

but Jess *is*, it seems. Send her in, my dear, with water, castile soft towels and a roll of old linen—Oh! and a piece of sponge."

Gertrude went into the kitchen, and sent Jess on her errand. Then she called John Brooks from the back yard, and directed him to bring in the breakfast and to wait on the table.

By the time that Colonel Fitzgerald and Gertrude had finished their morning meal, and while John Brooks was removing the service, Dr. Shaw entered the parlour.

"Well, Doctor, what report have you to make of our patient?" anxiously inquired Fitzgerald.

"The wound is a very dangerous one, sir; but not necessarily fatal. The knife has penetrated the right lobe of the lung. I have left full directions for his treatment with Jessie Bell, whom I know of old for a most skilful nurse," answered Dr. Shaw, who then bowed to Mrs. Fitzgerald and turned to leave the room.

"I will attend you to the gate, Doctor," said Fitzgerald.

"Pray, do not take the trouble. I am going up t Hill Top Hall, and shall look in here as I come back. Then, after seeing my patient again, I shall be better able to stand the cross-examination I know you have prepared for me," said Dr. Shaw, with a grave smile.

Fitzgerald bowed with a peculiar expression, that seemed to admit the impeachment, and the doctor departed.

Gerald turned to his little wife and said:

"My darling, I do not think we ought to leave this house under the present circumstances. We should remain here until the question of life or death is decided for poor Lackland. What do you say—shall we stay?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! Let us stay until he is well enough to accompany us to the Summit, or if there should be a different end to this, until he is called to another life. Oh, Gerald! I cannot tell you the strange, deep interest I feel in this old man! Yes, and *have* felt from the first moment I set eyes on him on board the *Zanzibar!* I do not understand it, Gerald! But I would like to sit by his bed and nurse him, as if I were his daughter!"

Fitzgerald started slightly, and looked at her intently. Her soft brown eyes, full of truth and love, were trustingly raised to his.

He understood, or thought he understood, the secret of her interest in Lackland, though she might not, for he more than suspected that Lackland was the husband of Magdala Haddon, and the father of Gertrude herself.

"Will you let me do all I can for him, Gerald?" she pleaded, with child-like meekness.

"My little love, you shall do all that you wish to do, now and ever, in all places and under all circumstances, for I know that you will always do right," he answered, gravely.

"But I wish only to do your will, Gerald. I have no will but yours. I am happy and at rest in being guided by you. Believe me, I am."

"I know it, my little love. And I will guide and counsel you when you need counsel and guidance; but I will never coerce and never restrain you. God forbid! for you are a free agent, little Gertrude, and your very love and submission a free offering. Now, in regard to our patient—yes, my darling, do all that you please for him; sit by his bedside day and night if you wish. Of course we must install old Jess in the sick-room as nurse; for, as the doctor says, she is skilful and experienced and very conscientious. I shall send the carriage back to the Summit by Hannibal, with orders to send our cook and your maid."

"Thanks, dear Gerald! You think of everything. But I—I can think only of the poor wounded man—I never *could* think of more than one thing at a time, you know."

"No, you intense little being! Not even of that which lies nearest to most women's affections—dress—though as pretty and trim as a little wren always, while I—I look like a dandy, just at present," said Gerald Fitzgerald, glancing from Gertrude's brown merino, which had been her sea-suit, and stage-coach suit, and was now her home-suit, to his own handsome dress suit, that he now wore for the lack of a plainer one.

"Never mind," said Gertrude, "these little matters can be attended to in a day or two."

"And we have more important matters to engage our

attention, that is true," added Gerald Fitzgerald, as he left the room to give the orders to his coachman.

Gertrude arose and passed silently into the sick chamber, where she found all the shutters closed, and the curtains drawn, and the room so darkened, that it was some moments before her eyes adjusted themselves to the obscurity, and enabled her to descry first, the fat form of Aunt Jess, sitting in silent dignity in an old arm-chair beside the bed, and next, the figure of the wounded man, lying prostrate on it.

She approached and looked upon him. His wound had been carefully dressed and bandaged; his hands and face washed; his hair cut and combed; and clean clothes, lavender scented, from old Gabriel Haddon's stores, put upon him; and he was now comfortably sleeping under the influence of an opiate. Old Jess whispered to her:

"He won't wake nor want nuffin for hours yet, so if you will sit here and watch him, I will go into de kitchen and wash my dishes, and den knock up some little delicky mess for him gin he do wake."

Gertrude put her finger on her lips as a sign of silence, nodded acquiescence, and took the seat vacated by Jess.

She kept her post patiently for two or three hours, during which the patient slept soundly without a movement or a murmur.

Meanwhile Colonel Fitzgerald, seated at old Gabriel Haddon's escritoire, wrote several letters—one to Captain Wailes, and one to Sallust Rowley, each expressing deep gratitude for their invaluable services to his wife in her extremity; one to Dr. Goodwin, informing him of the re-appearance, under disastrous circumstances, of the long-lost Adam Lackland; and one to the landlord of the Bald Eagle at Wendover, requesting him to forward Mrs. Fitzgerald's trunk.

These letters he dispatched to the Wildeville post-office by Jubal.

He sent his horses and carriages back to the Summit by Hannibal, with orders to send two female servants to Aunt Jessie's assistance, and a valise packed with the needful changes of clothing for himself.

Colonel Fitzgerald had scarcely completed his business before the doctor returned from Hill Top Hall.

"I learn that your patient has slept continuously ever since you left him," said Fitzgerald, in answer to the doctor's inquiries, as he attended him to the sick room.

"That is well," replied the physician, as he approached the bedside.

Gertrude got up, bowed slightly, and yielded him her place.

"Nothing more can be done this afternoon. If he should be restless, he must take the mixture I left for him according to the directions; but not unless he should be restless. I will be here very early to-morrow morning to look at his wound, and perhaps to renew the dressings," said Dr. Shaw, as he left the sick room, after having made his examination.

"I wish, Doctor, that you could, in justice to your other patients, remain with poor Lackland to-night," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"I wish so, too, with all my heart; but it is quite impossible, my dear sir. Good afternoon, Mrs. Fitzgerald. Good afternoon, Colonel. By the way, when I get to Wildeville I had better lay this matter before the sitting magistrate, so as to have measures taken for the arrest of the assassin. From what your man tells me it seems likely to have been a woman."

"Yes," answered Fitzgerald, coolly, for he did not wish to pursue the subject, or speak of his suspicions that Clea Phara had been the would-be murderess.

"Have you got the weapon—knife, the boy said it was?"

"It was a dagger—here it is. You can take it when you lay the case before the magistrate," answered Fitzgerald, as he took the instrument of death from the mantel-piece, where it had been placed, and gave it to the doctor.

"It must have been a powerfully strong hand that drove this so deeply into that poor fellow's back," said the doctor, examining the keen point and long blade of the dagger.

"And one nerved by madness," added Fitzgerald.

"That will be for the law to decide," answered Dr. Shaw, with a shrug, as he rolled the weapon in a piece of paper, picked up from the floor, and deposited it in his overcoat pocket.

Then he bowed his last adieux, and left the sick room and the house, calling to John Brooks to come row him over the ferry.

The same boat that took the physician across the Wilde brought back Jubal from the Wildeville post-office.

Later in the evening came the house-servants' carry-all from the Summit Manor, driven by Hannibal and occupied by Aunt Het., the cook, and Meta, the lady's maid who brought with them every convenience and comfort for their master's and mistress's prolonged stay at the ferry.

The meeting between the mistress and maid was an exciting one. The girl, on coming into the parlour and seeing her lady sitting there, ran forward and sank at her feet, and caught her hands and pressed them to her heart and to her lips, weeping tears of joy over them, until Gertrude raised her and made her sit down.

"Oh, mis'tess, I *is* so glad and thankful to see you once more ag'in in dis worl'! I means to 'tend church now twice ebery blessed Sunday, and twice in de weak, out o' thankfulness to the 'Vine Marster for dis great blessin'! And, mist'ess, dear, I fotch your little dog. She's out dere now; Jubal's got her. I bet anyfing she'll know you. Mus' I fetch her in?" asked Meta, wiping her bright eyes.

"Yes, bring her in. I wonder if she will. It has been a year and—and a fortnight since she saw me," said Gertrude.

The girl flew out of the hall and took the little skye-terrier from Jubal, and turned her loose in the parlour.

Nellie went sniffing round the room on an exploring expedition, until she came to her mistress, when she sniffed more than ever, whining with distress, and looking up 'nto her face with perplexity.

"Nelly, Nelly, don't you know me?" said Gertrude, patting the little creature on the head.

There was an instantanious change. With a bark of joy, Nellie leaped upon her mistress's lap, and with the most eloquent little dog language assured her lady that she remembered her, and loved her, and adored her perfectly.

But Gertrude had only left the sick room and come

out into the parlour to get a little fresh air, and to see her servants, when they should arrive, so now as soon as Aunt Het had come in and paid her 'duty,' the little lady put down her pet and returned to her post beside the invalid, who still slept under the influence of the opiate.

Gertrude sat by him all night, during which he lay in perfect repose, so that her duties as sick nurse were very light, consisting only in watching him, and in moistening his dry lips, from time to time, with little flakes of ice.

It was about sunrise the next morning when he awoke from this long sleep, but not to clear consciousness, for he seemed insensible or indifferent to all around him, and only mechanically he swallowed the beef juice prepared for him by old Jess, and fed to him, as he lay, from a teaspoon by Gertrude.

After this he lay moaning and feebly turning from side to side, answering vaguely or at random any questions put to him, so that no one, not even Colonel Fitzgerald, whose military life had accustomed him to such scenes, could tell whether he was insensible, or only indifferent to his surroundings.

Gerald and Gertrude had just arisen from their eight o'clock breakfast when Doctor Peter Shaw entered the room.

After hearing Gertrude's report of the manner in which the patient had passed the night he went into the sick room and made a personal examination of the sufferer, renewed the dressings of his wound, and changed the medicines.

"There is a great deal of local inflammation and a rising fever. He must be kept as quiet as possible, and the directions I have left with the nurse must be faithfully followed. I will see him again this evening," said the doctor, as he came out of the sick room, and took leave of the Fitzgeralds.

The afternoon of that day brought Sallust Rowley to Haddon's Ferry, in response to Colonel Gerald Fitzgerald's letter. Both Gerald and Gertrude received him and welcomed him with that hearty cordial affection his services merited.

"But I came" said Sallust, "mainly to help to take

care of poor Lackland, else I should not have ventured to intrude on your second honeymoon. That poor fellow! He does not seem to have been doomed to die by a violent death! Just think of it! Once condemned to death, once shipwrecked, and now murdered, or as good as murdered," said Sallust, after the first greetings were over.

"As *bad* as murdered, you mean, Rowley! Yes, I fear so; the doctor gives but little hope of his recovery!" replied Colonel Fitzgerald.

Gertrude, who had only left the sick room to receive her gallant young relative, now quietly returned to it.

"Who is nursing him?" inquired Sallust.

"We all take turns at it except my wife; and she never leaves his bedside for more than five or ten minutes, day or night."

"What! why does she devote herself to a comparative stranger, in that way?"

"It is her earnest wish."

"But why do you permit this?"

"I have the strongest reason to do so. Besides, in no case would I constrain the will of my gentle little wife. I should as soon dream of doing battle with a dove," said Fitzgerald, with a sweet earnestness.

"But she will wear herself out," objected Sallust.

"I think not. Her patient will scarcely last long enough for that," gravely replied Colonel Fitzgerald.

The wounded man was indeed growing rapidly worse. Fever and delirium set in, and increased in violence from hour to hour.

Dr. Shaw came in the evening and changed the dressings of his wounds, and remained in attendance at the bedside for several hours, only leaving him at last when compelled by other duties to depart.

That night no one about the house retired to bed.

Gertrude and Gerald sat by the patient, doing all they could to mitigate his terrible sufferings.

Sallust Rowley watched in the parlour to be at hand for any emergency. The servants nodded over the kitchen fire, to be ready to render any service.

Towards morning, however, the patient fell into a sleep of utter exhaustion, that lasted until the arrival of

his physician, who came even earlier than on the preceding day.

When he had received Colonel Fitzgerald's report of the patient's condition during the preceding night, he passed at once into the sick room, where he found Gertrude still seated at the bedside.

He greeted the lady, and then requested her to leave the room while he examined the wound of his patient, and to send the old nurse in with all that might be needed for a new dressing.

Gertrude went out, and the doctor bent over the dying man, who now opened his eyes, apparently free from pain, though much exhausted.

"Where am I?" he feebly asked.

"At Haddon's Ferry, as the guest of Colonel and Mrs. Fitzgerald, who are temporarily sojourning here," quietly answered the doctor.

"I thank Heaven! It is where, above all places on earth, I should choose to be. But who, then, are you, sir?" inquired the sinking man, in a faint and hesitating voice.

"I am your physician, Dr. Shaw. I hope you feel better, Mr. Lackland?"

"Yes, I feel quite easy, though very weak. And, Doctor, I know as well as you do, what this sudden cessation of pain and this extreme weakness mean; it means present gangrene and speedy death. On your honour, does it not? I am not afraid of your verdict, and I have matters of vital importance to others to settle before I go; so give me your confirmation of my thoughts," said the dying man, speaking in a voice often interrupted by weakness.

"I must look at your wound first, Mr. Lackland," replied the physician, evasively; and as old Jess now appeared with water, linen, lint, and other accessories, he began to take the bandages off preparatory to a new dressing.

One glance at the wound convinced the experienced doctor that all hope was gone, and the hours of his patient were numbered.

But he proceeded to dress it, all the same, and when he had bandaged it up again and drawn the clothes up over the man, the latter said to him, gaspingly:

"Now, Doctor, tell me—how long I have to live—and give me—the most powerful stimulant—you can think of—to keep me up—for I have much to say—before I depart."

Dr. Shaw poured out a small glass of brandy from a bottle that stood upon the mantel shelf, and gave it to his patient, saying:

"This is about the best thing that I can give you, and you may take it freely as you feel the need."

Lackland swallowed the contents of the glass and then said:

"It seems to put new life into me. But, Doctor, how long can I be kept up—by this?"

"Life and death are in the hands of the Lord, Mr. Lackland. You will probably outlive the day; but how much longer I cannot really say."

"Thank you, Dr. Shaw, for your candor. Will you kindly ask Colonel Fitzgerald, if he should be in the house, to come to me?"

"Yes, and I shall also send you in some strong beef juice. You will take it in connection with the brandy."

"Thanks. Yes, I will," said Mr. Lackland.

The doctor went out on his errand, and was soon succeeded by Colonel Fitzgerald, who came up to the bedside and said, kindly:

"I hope to find you better, Mr. Lackland."

"Thanks, yes, I am better. I am entirely free from pain, forever free from pain," replied the dying man. Then, looking earnestly at his visitor, he inquired: "Are we quite alone?"

"Yes, we are quite alone, Mr. Lackland."

"I am glad of it; but—my real name is not Lackland. The hour has come, Gerald, when I must reveal myself to you. I am Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STORY OF A PARIAH.

DEADLEY fear can time outgo
And blanch at once the hair;
Hard toil can roughen form and face,
And want can quench the eye's bright grace;
Nor does old age a wrinkle trace
More deeply than despair.
Happy, whom none of these befall,
But this poor wanderer knew them all.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

"'ARTHUR LLOYD FITZGERALD!' Great Heaven! can this be possible!" muttered Colonel Fitzgerald, as with suspended breath, and in a state of almost stupefaction, he gazed upon the dying man who had just made this incredible announcement.

"Give me that cordial, so I may have strength to tell you my story, while time serves," said the latter, in a faint voice.

Colonel Fitzgerald filled a small glass with spiced brandy and administered it to the patient, who, having drunk it, revived and continued his statement, saying:

"Yes, Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, the one black sheep in the snowy flock; the one spot on the spotless 'scutcheon; the one stain on the stainless plume of Fitzgerald; the prodigal son come home, not to be feasted with the fatted calf, but to be slain for his sins!"

The poor, wounded, suffering, sinking man paused in weariness.

Colonel Fitzgerald took his hand and pressed it kindly, but said nothing, for there was nothing to be said.

Arthur Fitzgerald resumed:

"I am changed, no less by years than by suffering; yet

I know I can be easily identified, as it is necessary that I should be. Hetty, my ancient nurse, and Hannibal, once my groom, will both know the face they loved so well, altered as it is, for that of their sometime 'Young Master Arthur.' Hetty, moreover, will know me by the scar of a burn on my foot, which she dressed until it was cured, and Hannibal, by the ship that I sketched and compelled him to tattoo in blue ink upon my wrist. But their testimony, though it might satisfy you and others, would be no legal evidence."

"My dear Arthur," said Gerald Fitzgerald, kindly, and giving him his true name, as though it were a customary act. "My dear Arthur, I have no doubt as to your identity, and no wish to dispute it. Indeed, circumstances that have come to my knowledge corroborate your statement, and make it most agreeable to my feelings to accept it as truth. Nevertheless, legal evidence of your identity is most desirable; for, as you *are* really Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, the only surviving son of my father's elder brother, it follows that you are the only lawful heir of the old Summit Manor, now held by me."

"I am not likely to deprive you of it, Gerald," said the dying man, with a gentle smile.

"But you may have heirs, whom we must see righted," replied Fitzgerald.

"Only 'one poor one!' One 'sole daughter of my house!'"

"And she?" anxiously exclaimed Gerald.

"Is your wife—Gertrude! Yes, Gerald, though you are not the rightful heir of the Summit Manor, you have unconsciously done the very best thing under the circumstances, that the most worldly-wise friend would have counselled you to do. You have married its sole heiress! Do I surprise you, Gerald?"

"No—not much."

"What?"

"I say that you do not surprise me much, for while I still knew you only as Lackland, circumstances came to the knowledge of Dr. Goodwin and myself that led to an investigation, which resulted in the certain conviction that our little treasure-trove, Gertrude, was the daughter of Adam Lackland and his wife, Magdala Haddon; but I never had a suspicion that your name was other than

you gave it out to be; certainly I never in the remotest degree connected it with that of the long-missing Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, my own nearest relative."

"No; and yet, Gerald, it was that very sense of kinship on my part that arrested my steps at Fort Terror, and caused me to leave my path and abide with you. To meet one of my own race, and such a one as you, Gerald, was as refreshing to my banished, home-sick soul as a spring of fresh water is to the weary, tired, thirsty traveller in the desert."

"Yet you never made yourself known to me, Arthur!" said Gerald.

"Why I did not, you shall know later. I wish now to speak of my daughter; believed for seventeen years to be numbered with the dead, and only within the last thirteen months discovered to be living in the person of your wife. Gerald—in that poor, nameless child you took to wife, you unconsciously married the wealthiest heiress in all the South! for listen: Gertrude Fitzgerald, besides being in right of her father, heiress of the Summit Manor, is in right of her mother, heiress of the Mountain Manor and of all other manors now held by Miss Geraldine Fitzgerald, and of Hill Top Hall, held by Miss Maxima Rowley, and lastly, in right of her grandfather, of Haddon's Ferry, which, when the new railroad establishes a depot there, and founds a town, will be a mammoth fortune of itself. You did not expect this when you married the humble ferry girl, did you, Gerald?" inquired the dying man, as a wan smile lighted up his pallid face.

"No, Arthur, of course not. I never thought of such a contingency; and to tell you the truth, I do not think much of it now. As for my wife, the deep sorrow with which I mourned her supposed loss for the last twelve months, and the joy I feel in her recovery, have taught me this—that she is more to me than all the wealth and glory of the world. No riches, no honours, can add to Gertrude's worth. As to myself, had another and not Gertrude inherited all this good fortune, and stripped me of my manors, why, I still have my commission and military career before me, and I would have taken my wife to frontier fort, or camp, or field—wherever duty called—and have been as happy with her there as in the halls of the Summit Manor. For I should have taken

her with me wherever I might be called to go. Nothing but death shall ever snatch her from me, even if death shall be permitted to do it."

"It fills me with joy and with sorrow to hear you say all this, Gerald—with joy that you have found in my child such a pearl of price, with sorrow that in all these eighteen years of her life I have never known her, except for the few days we spent together in the ill-fated *Zanzibar*," said the dying man, with a wan smile and a faint sigh.

"And yet you never made yourself known to her on the ship," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Why I did not you shall know later, if there be time to tell you. The most important things must be said first, for I have much to say, and afterwards I want my daughter to come to me and remain with me to the last."

"My dear Arthur, I have told you that while still knowing you only by the name of Lackland, I had discovered the sacred relationship you bear to Gertrude. So, soon after we brought you, wounded, to this house, I willingly yielded to her earnest desire and led her to your bedside, where she has been your constant attendant, by day and night, through all your fever and delirium."

"Heaven bless her! But does she *know?*"

"She does not, yet. To have told her would have disturbed her so much as to have unfitted her for her duties as nurse, where calmness and self-possession are so necessary. No, she *knows* nothing; but she *feels*—something; for she has devoted herself to you with all a daughter's loving duty."

"Heaven bless her!"

"She is absent from your bedside now only because you sent for me to a private interview."

"Yes, I understand; and when this interview shall be over, Gerald, you will tell her who I am and who *she* is, and send her to me, to stay with me to the last?"

"Most willingly, Arthur."

"And, Gerald, without further loss of time, you should send for three who will be able to indentify me, and whose testimony will be legal evidence—first, Miss Maxima Rowley, who will recollect me, because hate has a good memory, and she hated me for a wild, rebellious, unman-

ageble boy, whose bad example, she always said, had been the ruin of her nephew, Patrick Fitzgerald; old Benjamin Bowers, who will always remember me as his favourite vagabond companion; and lastly, Royal Greenleaf, who was my schoolmate, and who always boasted that he never forgot, or could forget a human face that he had ever seen. Send at once for these three persons, Gerald, if you wish to have me indentified, and the inheritance of my daughter secured."

Colonel Fitzgerald nodded gravely, an left the room to do this errand. He ordered Jubal to saddle the fastest of the two carriage horses that happened to be in the stable, and to make himself ready for a rapid ride. While the man was carrying out these orders, the master wrote three urgent notes, and in ten more minutes the messenger was flying over the turnpike road on his errand as for life or death.

Fitzgerald returned to the bedside of his cousin.

"Give me a little more of the stimulant, Gerald, and let me go on with my interrupted story."

Colonel Fitzgerald administered a few spoonfuls of beef juice and a half a wine-glass full of spiced brandy, and then resumed his seat by the side of the patient.

"I dare say, now, Gerald, that you have never heard a good word spoken of me in all your life," said the latter.

"On the contrary, Arthur, as Adam Lackland, I never heard anything but good words spoken of you," replied Gerald.

"But as Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald?"

"I never heard an ill word spoken of you, by that name," kindly replied Colonel Fitzgerald; but he did not think it necessary to explain that the name of the "black sheep" was tabooed among his relatives.

"Do you know what the crime was that made me an outcast from my family, my country, and my name?" inquired the elder Fitzgerald, with an irrepressible moan of distress, and a look of keen anxiety on his pallid face.

"I know what you dreamed of doing, but it is a harsh word to call that a crime which was but a wild freak of a romantic boy, who should have been checked by a timely restraint, and guided by good counsel, not prosecuted with a vindictive severity that came not of order

and discipline, but could only have proceeded from the basest cowardice and the most abject terror on the part of your prosecutors," said Colonel Fitzgerald, earnestly.

"Give me your hand, Gerald. You are the first friend who has ever done me justice in this terrible business. Heaven bless you for it!" murmured the elder Fitzgerald, with much emotion.

"But you are much mistaken, Arthur, in supposing that no one has done you justice. I have heard that the press of the country defended you at the time, commenting severely on the action of the court. On the other hand, retributive justice seems to have overtaken all the officers who sat there and perpetrated the cruel injustice of their sentence. Every one of them, by a strange fatality, has perished by a sudden and violent death."

"Yes," muttered the elder Fitzgerald. "One fell in a duel, two were lost at sea; one was stabbed in a gambling-house brawl; one was drowned while bathing; one perished in a burning house, and one fell by the hand of a wronged woman. A black death list, Gerald!"

"Yes, but let us think no more of it, Arthur. Tell me rather why you never returned to your home to seek a reconciliation with your father."

"I must tell you the whole story, Gerald. I have already told you that, as the only son of my father, I grew up a spoiled, wayward, unmanageable boy. My greatest misfortune, however, was the loss of my indulgent mother, when I was about fourteen years of age. After that, my father, always a stern man, as the phrase goes, 'took me in hand' to subject me to a course of discipline, not at all to my taste, and to which I was not inclined to submit. The end of it was that the controversy between us was compromised by his sending me to the Naval Academy. I left home then, and that was thirty years ago, Gerald, and I have never set foot in the Summit Manor House since."

"And you, the heir!" said Colonel Fitzgerald, sadly.

"Yes, and I its heir—its expatriated heir! You were too young to remember that departure, Gerald! You could not have been more than two years old, yet I remember you perfectly."

Colonel Fitzgerald shook his head and smiled.

"Well, Gerald, I passed four years at the Naval Academy, but was never permitted to come home for the holidays, nor, indeed, had I any desire to do so. At the end of the fourth year I graduated creditably, and was appointed midshipman on board the United States Frigate *Leviathan*, Captain Clyde McKendric, bound to the west coast of Africa. It was during this, my first voyage, that I became the subject of a species of insanity that can only find its parallel in the fictitious history of Don Quixote, and insanity, too, so powerful and contagious that I infected some of my comrades with it. To explain: From my childhood up I had been an ardent reader, or rather, a ravenous devourer of a certain mental poison, very dangerous, often fatal to the morals of the young; the lives and adventures of notorious pirates and buccaneers, brigands, and outlaws. These had for me the most absorbing interest, the most potent fascination, and, ah! the most fatal influence! Do you understand me, Gerald?"

"In a measure, I do; for I know a case in point. It is well proved that Schiller's wonderful play of 'The Robbers' so enchanted and demoralized the youth of Germany, for a whole generation, that many a young man of noble birth and gentle blood, longed to leave society, and

> 'Would be a robber bold
> And dwell in a dreary wood;'

so that if war had not broken out and given the young heroes a legitimate outlet for their boiling blood, no one can tell what else might have happened," added Colonel Fitzgerald, with a peculiar smile.

"Then, Gerald, you can comprehend the deadly spell which such studies worked upon my boyish mind during the long voyage of the *Leviathan*."

"Yes, with your peculiar temperament and training."

"I read and dreamed and brooded, until I was mad as the Knight of the Rueful Countenance himself. I longed for a life of wild adventure, of dashing exploits. I longed to be the captain of a pirate ship that should become the terror of the sea. I burned to be known as the 'terrible' the 'invincible' so and so."

"Boyish dreams," murmured Gerald Fitzgerald,

"Yes, boyish dreams, but see to what they led—to what a horrible awakening they led! The glamour of imagination with which I had invested the diabolical glory of such a name and fame dazzled and blinded me to the cost of crime and of blood for which it must be purchased. I never once thought of that—no, nor Heaven knows did I ever think seriously of such an utterly impossible enterprise as the taking of the great man-of-war *Leviathan*, and converting her into that *Scourge of the Sea*, the pirate ship of my dreams. Yet, nevertheless, 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' I could not read, dream, brood forever without some time letting my tongue run. Besides, unhappily for me, the captain and lieutenants of the ship were, with one exception, exceedingly unpopular with the crew, and they knew it. I had heard some low grumbling, like muttering thunder preceding a storm, and I laid it to heart."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CURSE.

BLAME me not that I am cried
A shipwrecked man ;
Ye cannot tell how strong the tide
And current ran.

ANON.

"WELL, Gerald, not to bore you with too long a story, one fatal hour, in the dead waste and middle of the night, the *Leviathan* was nearing the Cape de Verde Islands. I had the middle watch, and while I was alone at my post of duty, dreaming and brooding as usual of the future glory of the terrible pirate, Captain So-and-So, and his black ship, the *Scourge of the Sea*, I was joined by Birnie, the coxswain, who had just come up on deck to smoke a pipe. Now Birnie and I were as confidential friends as our relative positions would admit of our being. Birnie hated the Captain, and had a good cause.

"Well, Gerald, that fatal night I first spoke to Birnie of my dreams, for they were not plans, much less conspiracies. Heaven knows it was only to hear myself talk, to amuse myself and him during that midnight watch on the deck of the *Leviathan*, that I spoke at all. First I told him some of my most sensational lives of pirates, to which he listened with rapt attention. At length, borne on by my one idea from one extreme to another, I said, what a splendid achievement it would be if we could only lay a plan and win over the discontented crew, overpower the officers by force of numbers so as to win a bloodless victory, and then turn the *Leviathan* into a good pirate ship that should become the wonder and terror of the world. We would not kill the captain and

officers, I said, but would keep them in close confinement until we could safely set them ashore.

"Ah, Gerald, we were day-dreaming and castle building—nothing more; though Birnie did humour the notion of taking the great man-of-war and turning it into a still greater pirate ship, and said that he knew the crew would unanimously elect me for their captain.

"We talked on until my watch was over, and Past-Midshipman Clowes, who had the morning watch, came to relieve me. I did not turn in, however, but continued on deck, talking to Clowes as I had talked to Birnie, never dreaming of anything more serious than putting my visions into *words*, surely not into *acts*. Clowes, too, talked of the exploits we might perform, of the grand sea-fights we would have, of the splendid victories we should gain, and the gorgeous prizes we would capture! It was all talk, Gerald! nothing but talk! But so fascinated was I with the subject that I did not turn in until nearly daylight, and then I lay awake dreaming of it. It had no practical tendency, Gerald. We were not conspirators; we were only players."

"I am sure of it," earnestly answered Gerald Fitzgerald.

"Well, daylight is a disillusionist, and I thought little of our romantic talk, while busy with my duties. I did not have the watch that night, nor any opportunity of indulging in any more fancy plots. But the next night I had the morning watch, and while I was alone on deck, Birnie came to me, and much to my dismay said: 'I have sounded some of the men, and they take kindly to the idea of seizing the ship. They are going to sound some of the others. We shall hear more to-morrow.'

"This news thrilled and astonished me! Could it be possible that Birnie had taken all I had said in 'blood earnest,' and that the crew were so ripe for mutiny, so ready for privacy? Or was Birnie drawing on his imagination and playing with me, as I had been with him?

"'Is this so, coxswain?' I asked of him under my breath.

"'This is so, sir. We shall hear more to-morrow,' he answered.

"'But, coxswain, it would be utterly impossible to carry out the plan of seizing this great man-of-war! The crew wouldn't do it! Besides, think of the marines!'

"'The marines be mostly agin' us, sir; but they would be with us in this! They hate the captain and officers of this ship like p'ison.'

"Gerald, I confess I was appalled at the train of gunpowder I had inadvertently laid. No one can know the power and the consequence of a few idle words.

"'But, Birnie,' said I, 'this mad affair must go no farther! Neither you nor I would turn traitor to our flag!'

"'Lor, sir, what's the flag after all is said? Nothing but a bit of white, red and blue bunting patchwork! It's gone too far to go back, I'm thinking, sir. But we'll hear more to-morrow!'

"Ay, Gerald, we did hear more to-morrow! Sunrise found us just off the little harbour of Porto Praya in the Cape Verde Islands. But instead of sailing into the harbour, the ship lay to, and the drum beat to quarters. I was in the act of turning out of my hammock, when I was instantly arrested and put in irons. There was a panic throughout the ship. Too surely I divined the cause; but I thought foolish boy, that I was—I thought that I could easily make it all right by a candid explanation to my superior officers. Nor did I dream of danger to myself or comrades. I was rather glad that the intended mutiny was stopped before it could begin, and I rather wondered who had betrayed my playing at conspiracy. Later on, I discovered that several of the crew, whom the unfortunate fool, Birnie, had sounded, carried the news of the 'plot' to the captain who ordered the immediate arrest of the ringleaders! I, Birnie and Clowes were the ringleaders, and we were all put in irons within ten minutes after the first intelligence of our 'conspiracy' had reached the captain's ears.

"Action was taken upon us with a rapidity and vindictiveness only prompted by cowardice and cruelty. Listen! It was seven o'clock that morning when Captain McKendric received the first information against us. It was ten minutes past seven when we were arrested and thrown into irons, and at thirty minutes past seven we

were arraigned before a court martial composed of the captain and officers of the *Leviathan*. The trial was very brief. The testimony against us, as to our conversation, at least, was very direct and clear. The only defence that I could offer was the candid statement that I had intended to make to my superior officers, and which I vainly believed would save us. I made it; but it had no effect whatever; it was not even credited.

"We were remanded to the guard-room while our officers and judges deliberated on our case and settled our doom.

"They were not long about it. In an hour we were called in to hear our sentence. It was death. We were all three to be hanged from the yard-arm at sunrise the next morning.*

"I afterwards learned that the second lieutenant had held out for a time in favour of our acquittal, but that he had been talked over at last, and had given his vote with the others.

"The rapidity with which all this had occurred, had so stunned my senses that I could scarcely realize the situation sufficiently to suffer from it. I did, however, ask the privilege of writing to my father, and after it was granted me, I spent the morning in inditing a long letter of explanation to him, in the hope of clearing my fame in his regards. After I had finished and sealed my letter, I asked for a Bible, and spent the afternoon as long as daylight lasted, in reading the New Testament and in praying. When it was too dark to read I prayed only. They brought me food that I could not eat, for I seemed choking, and drink, which I quaffed with avidity, for I was consumed with thirst.

"Now, Gerald, you wish to hear how I escaped."

"Yes," said Colonel Fitzgerald, gravely.

"It was through the unsought, voluntary assistance of that same young lieutenant who had held out longest against my conviction. He thought that a cruel wrong had been done. His compassion was greater than his

* Many of our elder readers will remember a parallel case to this that occurred about thirty years ago, and for which the officers that sat upon the court martial were subjected to a Court of Inquiry, and censured.

prudence, and his sense of justice stronger than his sense of official duty.

"That day, you will remember, we were laying to off the harbour of Porto Praya, in the Cape de Verde Islands. In the night we sailed into Porto Praya harbour and safely anchored.

"That night the young lieutenant, who shall be nameless, had the middle watch. Then, with the help of two sailors whom he had won over, he secretly delivered me from my fetters and my prison, tied corks about me to help me to keep up, gave me brandy to add strength, and lowered me to the water's edge, bidding me to swim for my life to Porto Praya, and then make for the back country.

"Gerald, I was a champion swimmer in my youth. That night I had every material and mental aid for success. The sea was calm—I was lightly clothed, as when I left my hammock; I was aided by corks! I was materially stimulated by brandy, and mentally by the strong love of life and liberty. Yet that night's swimming was such a feat as has not often been accomplished in this world.

"I must have swam fifteen miles at least, before I reached the shore—a lonely beach below the town, where I threw myself down, so utterly exhausted that I fell asleep and slept like the dead, until the thundering boom of a cannon awoke me with a shock.

"I started up, conscious of some half-forgotten horror that I could not recall. The rising sun, shining full in my face, illumined my memory also! I understood the awful situation now! The hour of execution was passing; that booming cannon was the signal of my comrades' death —the ignominious death that I had eluded by a more ignominious flight! for so I then felt my escape to be! I could not rejoice in my freedom, in my safety! Ah, no! I cast myself down and rolled in the sands in anguish of spirit, such as I had never known in my life before, and have never known since! I was tempted to go back to the ship and give myself up, though the measure was utterly impracticable.

"I lay there, half-naked and rolling in the hot sands until my head began to burn and ache and throb. At length I grew delirious, frenzied, and started up with the

wild design of seeking the ship and of delivering myself up to justice; but before I had run many yards I fell prostrate and insensible to the ground.

"When I recovered consciousness, it was not morning but night, neither was it the hot sands under the burning sun, where I had writhed in an agony of mind and body, but a cool mattress, in a dark room, with the starlight visible through the open windows, where I lay with a delicious sense of coolness and repose.

"Yet my mind instantly took up the train of thought that had been interrupted by my illness.

"'Has the ship sailed?' I inquired.

"A voice answered me in an unknown tongue, and a pair of hands raised my head and placed a refreshing draught to my lips. I drank it, and fell asleep again.

"Well, Gerald, to be brief, it seems that I had been found upon the sands, burning with fever, and raging with frenzy, by some poor natives, who carried me to the house of a Portuguese priest living near the town. This poor priest had taken me in and nursed me through the long illness that followed; his poor parishioners, from their small means, ministered to my necessities of every sort, until my full restoration to health. They never knew my history; they never even asked it. I was the traveller, naked, bruised and wounded on the highway, and they were the good Samaritans who succoured me. That was all.

"To the priest alone, and under the seal of confession, I told the story of my sins and my remorse, and he comforted and counselled me, telling me not to think of taking any future measure without the knowledge and consent of my father, and advising me to go to England by the next ship bound thither that should stop at their port, and to communicate with my father from that safe distance.

"I followed Father Sebastiano's advice. A month after that I shipped as a man before the mast on an English merchantman bound for London, and so at length found myself safe under the British flag, for there was no extradition treaty in those days."

Hear Arthur Fitzgerald paused as if from exhaustion.

Gerald administered a few spoonfuls of beef juice and a half wine-glass of brandy, and then inquired:

"How was it then, that you were never heard from again as a living man, and that a report of your having committed suicide by throwing yourself overboard obtained universal credence, and was never contradicted nor even doubted?"

A strange smile played over the face of the elder Fitzgerald as he answered:

"Why I was never heard of again you will soon know. How the report of my suicide got about I will tell you as it was told me by one of the sailors who had assisted me in my escape, and whom I met years afterwards in California. This man gave me the sequel of that fatal night's proceedings. He said that he and his confederate had got the irons that they had taken off my limbs, and also they had obtained a cask of nails, and kept them ready near the starboard gangway until the end of the lieutenant's watch, when a midshipman came to relieve him and take the morning watch. (This was to save the young lieutenant from the charge of neglect of duty, you see.) Then they watched their opportunity, threw the irons and the cask into the sea, and simultaneously with the splash raised a cry of—

"'A MAN OVERBOARD!'

"Confusion followed. A search was made. I was the only one missing, and it was decided that I, fettered as I was, had thrown myself into the sea, where my irons had sunk me to the bottom.

"There you have the origin of the report and belief in my suicide, and also the reason why my escape was never suspected, and no pursuit was ever made for me.

"The sailor gave me another piece of information which touched me profoundly. It was that my unhappy comrades in misfortune had, with their last breath, exonerated me from any intention to tempt them into mutiny.

"Finally, the man told me that the young lieutenant who had saved my life was never suspected of having done so; but that, since he had broken the rules of the service, he considered himself in honour bound to resign his commission, and he *had* resigned it immediately on returning home.

"Now, Gerald, I must tell you how it was that the report of my suicide remained uncontradicted, and that I was never heard of again as a living man.

"When I reached England I wrote to my father a very penitent letter, informing him of my almost miraculous escape from an unmerited death, deploring my fatal folly, but utterly repudiating the charge of guilt, and beseeching him to answer my letter. I received no reply. I wrote again and again, to meet only a contemptuous silence. Then I wrote no more until long afterwards, when I learned that the *Leviathan* had returned home from her voyage; that the officers who had court-martialed and condemned to death me, and my unhappy companions, had been severely dealt with by an indignant press and people; that the general outcry demanded a Court of Inquiry into their proceedings; that this court had censured their conduct and reprimanded them. That was all.

"Then I wrote again to my father, told him of the former letters I had written, referred him to the action of the Court of Inquiry on my case, reminded him that this action made it comparatively safe for me to return home, and implored him to receive me. Gerald! my father answered me at last, and his letter condemned me to the life of vagrancy I have ever since led!"

"Great Heaven! Arthur, is that so? Was he so unrelenting?" exclaimed Gerald Fitzgerald.

"You shall hear. He wrote to me saying that he had received my first letters, but for obvious reasons he had ignored them, tacitly declining a correspondence with a *traitor and a felon!* That he should have treated my last letter in the same way, but for my threatened return home, which he now wrote to forbid under his heaviest malediction. He said I was the first to bring dishonour and reproach upon the stainless and illustrious name of Fitzgerald. He henceforth utterly disowned me as his son, and forever discarded me. He added that he only refrained from invoking upon my disgraced head Heaven's heaviest curse, on certain conditions—that I should forever renounce the name of Fitzgerald, and forever expatriate myself from my country. He concluded by saying that if ever I should presume to bear the name of Fitzgerald, or venture to set my foot

within the bounds of Virginia, even to claim my inheritance, a father's bitterest curse should fall upon me and blight me."

"That was ruthless! that was horrible!" exclaimed Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Inclosed in that letter was a bill of exchange on his London bankers for a thousand pounds, a little legacy, the postscript explained, that had been left me by my poor mother from her private property, which was to be paid me, by her request, when I should be twenty years old. Had it been my father's alms flung at his discarded son, Gerald, I should have inclosed and sent it back. It was my dear mother's offering, and I kept it.

"But, Gerald, that letter, that bitter, ruthless, cruel letter, not only held over me the threat of a curse—it was in itself the most deadly and damnable of curses. It made me a vagabond on the face of the earth. It neutralized all the good the worthy Portuguese priest had been able to do me. I went forth like another Ishmael, my hand against every man and every man's hand against me.

"I renounced my country and my name. I took the name of Adam Lackland; Adam, because I had fallen and was cast out of my Eden, and Lackland because I was disinherited and forbidden to set foot upon my own soil.

"In a spirit of utter recklessness I joined a band of gipsies; my swarthy complexion and black hair making me not an unlikely one of themselves.

"Ah, Gerald, how awfully the curse fell upon me and all connected with me, you have yet to hear."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WORK OF THE CURSE.

BLAME me not that I am cried
A shipwrecked man;
Ye know not how strong the tide
And current ran.
ANONYMOUS.

ARTHUR FITZGERALD continued his statement.

"I wandered with the gipsies for several years, and should have probably have remained with them longer, but for one circumstance.

"A handsome girl, called Clea Phara, grew up under my eyes. I knew her from her childhood, and made a pet of her.

Here the expressive face of Gerald betrayed so much disapprobation, that Arthur hastened to explain.

"Let me here assure you, on the honour of a gentleman and the conscience of a dying man, that Clea Phara never was nearer to me than a pet child! never my sweetheart, never, of course, my wife, as she crazily claimed to be. As to falling in love with, or marrying *her*, I should as soon have dreamed of falling in love with a pet kitten, or of marrying a pet bird. To my mind they were equally out of the question.

"Nevertheless, as the gipsy maiden grew to womanhood, it pleased her to set me upon a pedestal and fall down and worship me as an idol, much to my consternation and embarrassment. When for that reason I shunned her, she took my conduct so to heart that she put on an injured look, set up a grievance in my stead, and cherished *that* until her mind began to give way."

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Gerald Fitzgerald.

"You blame me, perhaps?" said the elder man.

"No, no."

"The truth is, when I loved, I always meant business. I would not court a girl whom I could not marry. Besides, I being as dark as a Moore, always adored fair women, and could not endure brown ones.

"I left the gipsies and went to London. I had my hair and beard trimmed into civilization, put myself into a respectable citizen's dress, and took decent lodgings in the heart of the city. After my long wanderings with the gipsies, through the rural districts, by a very natural mental reaction, I affected the busiest haunts of men.

"Up to this time, Gerald, I had scarcely touched my mother's legacy, which I had deposited in a London saving's bank, where it had lain for years accumulating interest. As I had no vices, Gerald, the interest on this money gave me enough to live on, with a little surplus over for an occasional visit to the theatre, when, as seldom happened, one of Shakespeare's plays was to be produced.

"Then to please myself, and to fill up some of the irksome hours of an idle man, I began to write criticisms on the drama, which I sent to a daily paper. Perhaps it was because I did not care whether they were taken or not that they were accepted, and because I did not want the money that they were paid for.

"So nearly a year had passed since I had left the gipsies, in which I never heard of Clea Phara.

"The first occasion on which I met her after our sudden separation was at Epsom, on the Derby Day. I had gone down there alone in a hired dog-cart. I may as well tell you now that in those days, in the vast multitude of London, I made no acquaintances except the necessary business ones. I was always alone, and so, even on the most social and convivial day of the English year, I drove alone in the great crowd that surged along or blocked up the Epsom road.

"There was on that day the annual countless collection of people from all parts of England, from Europe, and even America, to be found upon Epsom Hill.

"Among them, of course, were the ubiquitous and inevitable gipsies, going from carriage to carriage, asking to

'tell the fortune' of this or that 'good gentleman' or 'pretty lady.' I avoided the gipsies, in the dread of meeting Clea Phara.

"In the crowd of vehicles just below the hill I presently saw what seemed to be a market-gardener's cart, occupied by a merry family party—a jolly father, a buxom mother, and four or five blooming girls and boys, all enjoying themselves in the highest degree.

"But what chiefly attracted my attention was not the gardener's cart, nor the family party, but the fair and lovely being that sat in their midst—among them, but not of them.

"Gerald, we have all heard of the famous beauty of Lilian Vale, and we remember what a grand Apollo, Gabriel Haddon was. Think, then, what the daughter of their love marriage must have been! This fair creature was Magdala Haddon, as I afterwards learned. I always admired blonde women; *she* was the fairest of blondes. Yes, the very fairest of the fair. Her complexion was as pure, as clear, and as fine as the petals of the white camelia, her eyes as blue as the heavens of June—her hair! who can imagine the glory of her hair? it is indescribable—"

"'Silver in the sunshine and golden in the shade,'" said Gerald Fitzgerald, with a smile, as he quoted the words of old Gabriel Haddon.

"Yes, that will do for want of a better simile to describe that light, rippling, shining, living radiance. To say that I loved her at first sight would but faintly express what happened. It was not only love, it was adoration at first sight!

"I was then sitting in my dog-cart a few yards from her, but directly in front, with a full view of her face, and I was still wrapt in the contemplation of its beauty, when suddenly a young gipsy came to the front of her carriage and partly hid her from view. The gipsy's back was turned to me; yet I knew her in an instant.

"She was Clea Phara!

"I was startled, and would have left the spot, had I not been spell-bound by the beauty of my angel! I called her my angel even then! The gipsy was begging to tell the pretty lady's fortune. And the fair creature good-humouredly crossed Clea's hand with a silver sixpence,

and then held out her own, and received the usual formula in return, unlimited promises of wealth, lovers, travels, etc. Then I saw the fair candidate for all this happiness take from her bosom a little pocket-book and give it to the gipsy, saying:

"'I give you this for a keepsake for telling me such a good fortune. See, it has my name on it—"Magdala."'

"Clea took it, and went on her way, never having turned her face towards me.

"I wondered whether that beautiful girl had really believed all the jargon told her by the gipsy, or whether in making that little present, she had only done a childish impulsive act of kindness. I was inclined to the last opinion."

"The gift of that pocket-book with her name on it, however, caused a long mistake," said Colonel Fitzgerald, who, then, in a few words, explained to the elder man, how the relic being found on the person of the mad gipsy when she was rescued from the flood, and seeming the only possible clue to her identity, had caused the name of Magdala to be given to Clea, to whom it ever afterwards clung. "But excuse this interruption, and go on with your story," said the Colonel.

"After the departure of the gipsy, I managed to get nearer that cart, so as to see and hear more of the fair being who had, unconsciously to herself, taken full possession of my soul. Then I gathered from their conversation among themselves, that the father was a market-gardener, who attended Covent Garden Market.

"Having learned so much, I made up my mind what to do. I would frequent Covent Garden Market, until I should find my gardener; then I would follow him home and contrive some way of a respectable introduction to the family. Then I would woo and marry the girl.

"The jolly party left the grounds immediately after the great Derby race, because, as I heard the mother remind them, the father had to get ready for market early the next morning.

"I did not remain long after them. I left the grounds, and took the road to London, for I also had resolved to be early at market the next morning.

"To be brief, I carried my resolution into effect, went to Covent Garden, found my man, found that his name was Robbins. When he left the market in his waggon, I left in my hired dog-cart. I followed him to Upper Norwood, to his little place, 'The Cherries,' where I had the good fortune to see a card in the front window with 'APARTMENTS TO LET.'

"My excuse for entrance was before me. I went up and knocked at the door, and when a maid-of-all-work appeared in answer to my summons, I asked to see the rooms, and was admitted.

"The mistress of the house came to show them to me. I expressed myself pleased with the apartments and ready to take possession of them. I represented myself as a journalist—which I was, to some extent—and I expressed a perfect willingness to pay my rent monthly in advance.

"All this seemed so satisfactory that a bargain was struck with my landlady at once, and the same day, at dusk, saw me settled in my new apartments under the same roof with my fair one.

"So much in earnest was I, that feeling myself to be a stranger to them, I sought so to adapt myself to these good people, as to make the most favourable impression on them. Finding them to be steady, God-fearing, church-going people, I, who was already steady, became church-going too. At length," added the narrator, with a smile, "my good landlady was heard to say that she considered me a wonderfully moral and religious young man, considering that I was a newspaper person.

"Meanwhile, I made good progress in the favour of my fair one, and in due time I formally solicited her hand of her parents; for up to the hour of my proposal, I believed the honest market-gardener and his wife to be Magdala's parents.

"I fully expected hesitation, perhaps opposition; but to my astonishment, I was met by deprecation and apology. Magdala, they told me, it was their bounden duty to confess, was not their child, although they had reared her and loved her as such. That indeed they would be very willing to accept me as a son-in-law, and glad to see Magdala so well settled, but not under false pretences.

"Then I assured them that it could make no sort of difference to me who or what Magdala really was, *since she was herself*, but implored them all the same to tell me all they knew about her. They told me the circumstances of her birth in a hospital, and of the engagement of her foster mother as her nurse; of the year she spent at the bosom of her nurse, during which her unknown parents or guardians had remitted money for her support; of her subsequent abandonment by her relatives, and of her falling upon the charity of her foster-parents, who brought her up and educated her as their own daughter. All this they told me, and then they produced a package of old letters—correspondence it seemed between the girl's father and mother—which, however, gave the foster-parents but a faint clue to the origin of the girl, because they had not the key to the mystery.

"I examined these letters, and to my unbounded amazement, I discovered that this child, ignominiously born in the hospital, was the daughter of that grand old ferryman, Gabriel Haddon, and his beautiful patrician wife, Lilian Vale. Knowing this, I also knew that in right of her mother she was also heiress of some half dozen of the finest old manors in Wilde county.

"I told her good foster parents this, and I told Magdala, and though it cost me the severest struggle to do so, I told them that, under the circumstances, I, a poor, nameless journalist, would withdraw my pretensions to the hand of Miss Haddon.

"But neither the foster-parents nor their child would hear of such a sacrifice. I had loved her and wooed her when I supposed her to be the market-gardener's penniless daughter, and so I should have her, even though she proved to be the great heiress I supposed. So said the honest man and his wife, and their foster-child fully agreed with them.

"Well, my dear Gerald, they were simple people, and though they gave their hearty consent to our marriage, they had to consult the curate, the next door neighbour, and several other worthy folk, before they would venture to fix the wedding-day.

"Happily all these counsellors proved propitious, and a time was set for our marriage.

"I employed the interval in going to the private

hospital where Magdala was born, and to various other places to which I had obtained a clue, to collect evidence of Magdala's identity as the daughter and heiress of Gabriel Haddon and his wife, Lily Vale. I succeeded in perfecting a complete chain of evidence, of which every individual link was as strong as fate could make it."

"I know," said Colonel Fitzgerald, "I have seen it all."

"You have seen it all," echoed the elder man, in astonishment.

"Yes; do you not remember, that in the beginning of our conversation, I told you that circumstances had arisen about three years ago, that started Dr. Goodwin on a search for the missing daughter of Gabriel Haddon, whose very existence had not been suspected until the death-bed confessions of old General Slaughter, and that his investigation resulted in the discovery that she had been adopted by a market-gardener, of the name of Robbins, and afterwards married to one Adam Lackland. Other circumstances pointed directly to the fact, since confirmed, that our Gertrude was the sole child of that marriage. In truth, Arthur, nearly all that you have told me of your courtship and marriage to Magdala Haddon, had already been related to Goodwin and myself by the market-gardener and his wife. They also put in our possession the original documents of which you had only taken the attested copies."

"Yes," said Arthur Fitzgerald, "for safety I left the original papers with them, thinking that the attested copies would be sufficient for my purpose. I hope you have the original ones safe."

"Yes, they are in the keeping of my solicitor in Wildeville."

"I am glad of that, for Gertrude's sake, and for yours. Well, Gerald, doubtless Robbins told you that after our marriage one circumstance or another delayed our journey to Wilde county until we had passed a year with them, and our child, Gertrude, was born."

"Yes; but these circumstances seemed scarcely of sufficient importance to delay a journey upon which so much depended."

"I don't know. It was important to get all the evidence together, and that took time; then to get it all

properly copied and assorted, and lawyers are proverbially slow. By that time my fair and fragile young wife became very delicate in health, and could not leave her foster-mother, far less could she venture on a long sea voyage. Next, it was discovered that she expected to become a mother. It was expedient to defer the voyage until after the advent of her child. Thus it happened that we did not sail for the United States until we had been married for rather more than a year.

"Neither during this time did I once write to anyone in Wilde county, to make any inquiries for those I had left behind.

"There were several reasons for my not doing so. First, being under the ban, I could not write to my father, and I did not choose then to take a stranger into my confidence.

"I once thought of writing to old Gabriel Haddon, but the impression among us all was, that he had long since died, and I felt it would not do at this juncture of affairs, to risk a letter intended for him getting into the hands of another, and setting all the gossips of Wilde county talking of our affairs. Besides, from month to month I expected to go over.

"Well, Gerald, I, my young wife, and our four weeks' old babe, sailed from Liverpool about the last of June, and landed at New York on the 10th of July. The next day I started for Virginia."

"And that was the last that was known of you for years! I confess I am very anxious to hear the history of your sudden and unaccountable disappearance," said Gerald Fitzgerald, earnestly.

"You *shall* hear, and then you will not only acquit me of blame, but you will pity me."

"I do so *now;* I know that you have been 'the most unhappy man of men,'" said Gerald, with earnest sympathy.

"Yes; it was my father's curse! Oh, how that curse blasted and blighted my life! Well, I landed, as I said, on the 10th of July, and set out with my little family for Virginia, on the 11th. I had been absent from my father's house for fourteen years; from my native land for ten, and eight years had passed since my father's stern letter had discarded me for ever, forbidding me

under the condemnation of his heaviest curse, ever to bear the name of Fitzgerald, or to re-enter my native county, even to claim, at his death, my rightful inheritance.

"In just resentment I had accepted the doom he pronounced against me. I had cast off his name and taken no other man's, but I had invented one for myself. I called myself Adam—because I had fallen, and Lackland, because I was homeless. I had refrained even from writing home. To whom, indeed, could I have written?

"Now, when I was returning, I did not even know whether I should find my father living or dead, or if living, whether I should find him unrelenting. I still travelled under the name of Lackland. To no one, not even to my beloved young wife, had I divulged my real name and rank; nor did I intend to do so, until my father, if living, should *request* me; for now coming home after so many years of absence, I recalled the fact, that, after all, I was his *only* son, unless, indeed, he should have married a second time and reared another family; and even in that case, I was still his eldest son and heir, whom he might discard, but could never disinherit, since the Summit Manor was settled upon me; and I thought it probable, therefore, that he would be willing, if not glad, to revoke his sentence of banishment against me, especially when, in addition to other reasons for doing so, he should find that I had married the wealthiest heiress in Wilde county.

"With these thoughts in my mind, I no longer dreaded his curse, though it was soon to fall upon me and grind me to dust. So little did I think of it that I resolved, on reaching Wildeville, to proceed at once to Summit Manor, to make myself known.

"As I travelled down by stage, with my little family, I occasionally made cautious inquiries of my fellow passengers concerning Wildeville, but without effect. They were people going to other parts of Virginia, and they left the stage at various post-houses to take cross routes.

"At length, however, when we reached Undercliff, the nearest post-house to Wildeville, a party entered, who, from their talk, proved to be Wilde county people.

"Of them I cautiously inquired and learned, to my dismay, that my father had been dead for seven years and that his youngest brother, Otho Maurice Fitzgerald, reigned in his stead. Also, that Gabriel Haddon, the ferryman, still lived, loved and honoured by all who knew him, notwithstanding the terrible wrong that had sought to brand his young manhood with infamy. Finally, that Hiram Slaughter yet cursed the earth with his baleful existence.

"Oh! what retributive justice, in good and in evil, I thought I should soon visit upon these men! What joy I should bring to the lonely heart and home of Gabriel Haddon. What exposure and ignominy to that of the aristocratic felon, Hiram Slaughter. But first I must go to Summit Manor.

"There could be no doubt now as to my course. Immediately on reaching Wildeville I must proceed at once to the Summit Manor and claim the inheritance, out of which I had been kept for seven years."

"Unconsciously so kept, Arthur," said Gerald Fitzgerald, gravely.

"Yes, I know. I blame no one now. I blamed no one even then! and as it turned out, in less than twenty-four hours I cared nothing at all about it. Calamities far heavier than a lost inheritance fell upon me, as if in awful response to my father's invoked curse upon my venturing into Wilde county again."

"The flood of July fifteenth," murmured Gerald, in a low voice.

"Yes, the flood, which in a few hours converted the green and beautiful valley of the Wilde into a vast inland sea, covering villages, hamlets and farm-houses, drowning hundreds of cattle and scores of human beings, and desolating my own life, sending me forth again into the wilderness an accursed man!"

Here Arthur Fitzgerald covered his face with his hands and fell into silence.

Gerald administered a glassful of the beef juice and a half a glass of brandy. This somewhat revived the sinking man, so that after a few minutes he resumed his story.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FATE.

In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires glow warm and bright

* * * *

"Try not the pass," the old man said.
"Dark lowers the tempest overhead."

LONGFELLOW.

"MEANWHILE the sky was growing dark with clouds, and by the time the stage-coach drew up in front of the Antlers, in Wildeville, the whole heavens were overcast, and a thunderstorm seemed imminent.

"Now, Gerald, you know that we never can tell much about these storms in the mountains from the looks in the clouds. Often when they seem most threatening they pass off harmlessly, with a few peals of thunder and flashes of lightning, ending in a little shower.

"My fellow-passengers all took refuge in the village inn, resolving to remain there until the storm should be over. But I was burning to get on to the Summit Manor and make myself known to its wrongful possessor. So, still under the name of Lackland, I ordered the inn hack to be got ready to convey me and my little family thither. Evidently all who heard the order thought that we were summer visitors to Mr. Maurice Fitzgerald, and all with one accord sought to dissuade me from my intended ride.

"'The sun had set,' they urged, 'and the night was coming on. A thunder-storm was rising and would certainly overtake us before we could reach Haddon's Ferry;

and if it should not be over by that time, it would be very dangerous, or perhaps quite impossible, to cross the Wilde. We had much better make up our minds to stay all night at the Antlers.'

"But despite of all argument or persuasion, I put my wife and child into the carriage, had our baggage strapped on behind, entered, and set out on my fatal journey to Haddon's Ferry.

"Of course, neither I nor my advisers had any premonition of the horrible tempest and inundation that was destined to spread such wide destruction before morning. The very worst *they* feared was a severe thunder-storm. *I* did not even fear that, but hoped that the clouds might pass away, or, at worst, come down in a sharp shower, from which I could easily defend my little party by merely closing up the carriage and perhaps stopping under the thick shelter of a large forest-tree, until it should be over.

"It is said, Gerald, that whom the Fates wish to destroy they first make mad. Indeed it seemed so with me, or I should not, in my haste to reach the Summit Manor, have exposed my wife and child on that fatal night's ride.

"We set out for Haddon's Ferry, and, heavily laden as the carriage was, we drove slowly.

"The storm overtook us at Cave Court Cross Roads. We closed up the carriage, and stopped under an old shed, once a blacksmith's shop, but then deserted.

"We stayed there amid the fiercest tempest that I had ever known. We stayed until there came a lull in the fury that deluded us into the idea that the storm had passed; then we recommenced our journey, and entered the mountain road leading through a gorge of the Eagle Roost Ridge down to the ferry.

"We descended to the river side. It was raining lightly, and we thought the storm was over.

"The hack-driver helped me to transfer my little party and our luggage to the ferry-hut on that side, and then hastily mounted his box, and drove off on his return; for I had made up my mind that I would go no further than Gabriel Haddon's house that night, and I pleased myself with the thought of the amazement with which the old man would hear of the existence of this daughter, out of

whom he had been cheated so many years, and of whose very being he had never heard. I pictured to myself the delight with which he would welcome her and her infant, his granddaughter, and myself, who would bring them to him.

"My young wife fully entered into all my feelings, and even exceeded them in eagerness.

"Immediately on finding ourselves in the ferry-hut, where a dim lantern was doing duty as a watch-light, I took the horn hanging by it, and blew a blast to summon the boat, thinking:

"'Ah, old ferryman, if you knew who was on this side you would make haste.'

"My summons was answered, but not from the ferry; it was answered from the sky by a roll of thunder such as I had never heard before, and have never heard since that night. It was instantly followed by a flash of lightning that seemed to set the world in flames, and then by a deluge of rain. The storm had returned, and we all know what a returning storm means on these mountains. It is the worst of all storms.

"We were well protected from the weather, however, in that ferry-hut, but my wife was exceedingly weary with her three days' and nights' journey in the stage-coach. She could scarcely sit up on the hard and narrow bench that formed the only seat of the hut. Oh, how deeply I regretted the impatience that had tempted me to pursue my journey that fatal night! Ah, before the night was over I had still heavier cause to mourn my restlessness!

"The tempest raged with unprecedented fury, yet with intervals of comparative peace between its paroxysms. In these intervals I continued to blow the horn, and call the boat, if only to let the ferryman know that there was someone on this side, waiting the first available moment of crossing; but, of course, I did not expect that he would come for us then.

"At length a response came to my call—it was:

"'Impossible now. Wait until the storm is over.'

"I was satisfied then that I had been heard at last, and so I waited patiently.

"My poor little wife, however, was worn out with fatigue, and could scarcely keep from falling upon the floor.

"I cudgeled my brains to discover, or invent some means for her relief. I had noticed in one of the intervals between the paroxysms of the tempest, a light burning low on the banks of the river, a few yards up the stream. It seemed to shine from some humble cabin. I resolved to make my way to it, and find out whether I could get a bed there for my poor weary wife and her babe to lie down on, to rest for a few minutes, or hours, as the storm should please.

"I told my wife this, and left her to go towards the cabin. I found it to be the dwelling of a poor young couple and their only living child, a boy of three years old.

"I told them my difficulty, and they expressed the greatest pleasure in the prospect of sheltering my weary ones.

"I went back to the ferry-hut and told Magdala, then waited until another convulsion of the elements was over, and took her to the river-side hut, where she was received with the greatest kindness.

"I stayed until I saw her asleep on the only bed in the house, and her babe asleep in the only cradle. Then I went back to the ferry-hut to wait for the boat.

"How long I waited! The storm increased in fury and raged all night! The river rose and overflowed its banks! The water ran over the floor of the ferry-hut.

"Then I grew alarmed for the safety of my dear ones, and left the hut to hasten to them.

"I found, to my horror, the pathway to the cabin cut off by the rising of the river, that now reached the very foot of Eagle Roost Ridge. I had to climb the precipice above the waters, and there, in night and storm and total darkness, holding on to the stunted cedars that clothed the steep, and swinging myself from one to another, I struggled up the river until I reached—the cabin? Ah, Heaven, no! But the place where the cabin had stood!

"It was gone, swept away by the floods!"

"Oh, horrible!" groaned Gerald Fitzgerald, under his breath.

The elder man scarcely noticed the interruption; he continued:

"Day was dawning, and I could see far up and down the river. River!—it was no longer a river! but an inland sea! It filled the whole valley from Wild Cat Cliffs on the east to Eagle Roost Ridge on the west, and even rose high against those rocky walls. Upon its bosom drifted the bodies of horses, oxen, and sheep, struggling with death, and the ruins of fences, farms and hamlets, carried off by the flood.

"In that hour of utter agony, I should have cast myself into the water and perished, but that I was seized and held back by a powerful pair of arms—arms nerved by madness!

"I turned and saw that Clea Phara held me in a vice-like grasp, and glared upon me with frenzied eyes.

"Before I could recover from the amazement her presence caused, she hissed into my ear:

"'You have broken my heart, and my demon guide has, in reprisal, wrecked your life! Behold your wife and child, and those who ventured to protect them, are drowned in the depths of the river. To see this, I followed you here. I came over with you in the steerage of the same ship. I came down with you on the top of the same coach. I followed you on foot from Wildeville to the ferry. Oh, no! you never knew nor suspected my presence. Your mind and senses were too much absorbed in the contemplation of your lily-fair wife and her child. But now I am avenged! The whey-faced girl and her brat are food for fishes!'

"Then I maddened!

"'IT IS MY FATHER'S CURSE!' I shrieked, as I threw off the woman's hold with so much violence that she fell into the river with a heavy plunge.

"Utterly indifferent to her fate, maddened, frenzied, I fled up the mountain side and plunged into the depths of the forest.

"I was lost to myself for many days. I must have wandered far and wide, for when I came to my senses I found myself in the pauper ward of the insane asylum at Staunton, without the slightest idea of how I came there.

"Later I learned that I had been picked up in the streets as a wandering and friendless lunatic, and sent to the asylum by the overseers of the poor, or some such town authorities.

"Those who had sent me thither did not know my name, but on my recovery, I gave it as Adam Lackland.

"In due time I was discharged from the lunatic asylum as cured.

"I did not go back to Wilde county. I could not do it, even to make myself known, and to claim my inheritance. What indeed, was my inheritance to me when my wife and child were gone? I had entered the neighbourhood in defiance of my father's curse, and in consequence that curse had fallen upon me like a thunderbolt, blasting and destroying my life!

"You may call the terrible calamity that overtook me a mere coincidence, Gerald! I look upon it as the fulfilment of the curse! And succeeding events confirmed me in this view.

"I had gone into Wilde county after fourteen years of absence, during which I had passed from youth to middle age and no one recognized me. I had gone under the name of Adam Lackland, and no one knew that Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, the heir of the Summit Manor, had been among them. That was the reason why the belief in my death continued uncontradicted.

"After leaving Staunton, again I became a wanderer on the face of the earth. I have been in every part of the habitable and unhabitable globe. I have been to the Arctic Circle with a crew of explorers in search of the North Pole. I have been in the East, looking for the source of the Nile. I have hunted the lion in Africa and the bison in America. I have been on whaling voyages, and on 'filibustering' expeditions.

"Enough!—I was a hunter of the plains when I first met you, my kinsman. You cannot know what, to the solitary, homeless exile, was the sight of a kindred face. I knew that *your* father sat in my hereditary halls; and that *you* would succeed him. Did I hate you upon that account? Not at all. I loved you as my kinsman, and as the noblest—well there! I will not say that to your face. I did not make myself known to you, Gerald,—*because of the curse*. You may call it superstition, monomania—I have cause to know better!

"No; I did not make myself known to you, Gerald; but I remained with you as long as you stayed at the fort, and I accompanied you when you returned home to be

married—that is, I accompanied you as far as Washington. I dared not go down into Wilde county—*because of the curse.* Now you know the reason why I so persistently declined your invitation to accompany you to the Summit Manor.

"We will not dwell on the dire misfortunes that came upon me in Washington. My falling, for the first time in my life, into the toils of that siren, who jilted me and lost herself, and caused me to avenge her by taking the life of my rival!

"You stood by me like a brother in those days, and all through that criminal trial, Gerald! But ah, my kinsman! You, too, came in for a share of the curse, by succouring the accursed! It was through your devotion to me, Gerald, that you lost your sweetheart, your betrothed of so many years! See what it is to come within the shadow of the malediction. My poor boy! You left heaven and crossed the great gulf to give a drop of water to the parched sinner in hell, and you got horribly scorched in the act! How you must have suffered, Gerald! How you must have hated me as the cause!"

"How wildly you talk, Arthur! These sufferings you speak of were transient, and resulted in the greatest blessing that could have come to me! I shall thank Heaven for them every day of my life. I lost Geraldine, indeed. But I found Gertrude! I found the angel of my life! She was worth the suffering—all the suffering—ten times told," said Gerald Fitzgerald, earnestly.

"Heaven bless you for these words, Gerald. And may my girl be all to you, that you think her! She could not be more," replied the elder man, with emotion.

"Compose yourself, dear friend, and go on."

"I have not much more to tell you, Gerald. After my acquittal, again I became a wanderer, resolving never more to approach my native State; for every time I came near it, the curse fell upon me with a fresh disaster. I went to Europe, and wandered there for about two years, all the while with a longing home-sickness, only appreciated by those who, like me, *may not return!*

"At length I received a summons to come home. I saw in the papers an advertisement for Adam Lackland, pressing him to communicate at once with the advertiser—a Wildeville lawyer—and to hasten to Wilde county

with all convenient expedition, where he should hear something to his advantage.

"Now, Gerald, would not any poor exile, in my circumstances, have considered that invitation as a repeal of his sentence of banishment? A lifting off of the curse? I hailed it with joy! I was in Southampton at the time. Instead of writing, I resolved to answer the advertisement in person by the first mail steamer? The ship should take *me* over instead of my letter.

"Well, I embarked on the ill-fated *Zanzibar*. There, to my surprise, I met Sallust Rowley, whom I had not heard of since we parted in Washington. He told me news of you, and strange news of your wife and her rescue, and even while we spoke together Gertrude came on deck! I was so overwhelmed by the sight of her that I nearly fell to the floor; for it seemed to me that my long-lost fair young wife passed before me! Luckily she did not approach us but went forward.

"Breathlessly I inquired who she was, and learned that she was the very Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald of whom we had just been speaking. But I wished to know more of her than that, and so I pushed inquiry until young Rowley told me all her story, and I then knew that this lovely young being must be the very child whom I had long deemed dead, drowned in the Wilde, but who had really floated in the little cradle until she landed among the white water-lilies at the foot of her grandfather's garden, and was rescued by him.

"No language can describe the emotion with which I heard her story. Yet I did not betray myself. I did not make myself known to Sallust Rowley, or even to my beautiful new-found daughter. I resolved to defer all that until I should reach Wilde county and find out what was wanted of Adam Lackland, whether perhaps news was wanted of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald.

"Nor did I see much of my daughter during the voyage. She kept very much to herself, as if she thought, poor dear, that a young wife travelling in other company than her husband's should deport herself with unusual reserve and discretion.

"I saw enough of her, however, to notice it was only at a distance, and in her form, features, and motion, that she was so much like her mother. On nearer view I

saw that, whereas her mother had azure eyes and silvery golden hair, Gertrude has brown eyes and brown hair.

"Ah, well! one stormy night in March the *Zanzibar* was wrecked on an island of ice, and we had all to take to the life-boats. That night, or rather early the next morning, we parted without leave-taking. The boat that I was on was picked up by the *Mikado*, a merchantman bound to Yokohama, and so I made a compulsory voyage to Japan.

"'*It is my father's curse*,' I said in my despair. Again my attempt to return to my native place calls down the curse in dire calamity on my head. My greatest desire was to hear the fate of my daughter, who had been put upon another life-boat, which I thought must have been picked up by some ship bound to some much nearer port to our native land.

"I took the first homeward-bound vessel, and returned. I arrived at New York about a week ago. What met me there? A paragraph in a newspaper saying that Mr. Sallust Rowley, and Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald, long supposed to have been lost in the missing life-boat of the *Zanzibar*, had arrived in Baltimore, in the *Becky*, Captain Wailes, from San Francisco, and had departed for Virginia.

"So intense was my longing to see my daughter, that I resolved once more to brave my father's fatal curse, and come down here, let the consequences be what they might. I set out the same day on my return to Wilde county. I arrived at Wildeville on Tuesday night, where I found everybody talking of the unexpected return of Gerald Fitzgerald's wife. I did not wait to hear particulars. I would hasten to the Summit Manor and see my daughter, even though the curse should strike me dead at her feet!

"I could not get a hack in the village; but being a good walker, I set out to walk the distance. I knew it would take me all night, but then I thought I should see my child in the morning!

"I walked well that night. I reached the entrance of the Eagle Roost Pass about midnight—a silent, solitary, awe-inspiring wilderness; but I was as used to such

like places as the Wandering Jew himself, and did not mind it.

"One circumstance, however, disturbed my nerves not a little.

"*I seemed to be followed.*

"There was the sound of a soft step falling on the dead leaves of the pass, the swish of some garment brushing the bushes in narrow places, and the low panting of a hurried breath.

"I called out several times—

"'Who is there?'

"But only utter silence answered me, and soon the falling steps, the swishing garment, and the panting breath would be heard again.

"I turned around, and raising my thick walking-stick, I beat along the path and up the bushes.

"I found only utter solitude and stillness until I resumed my walk, when again the cautious footsteps, the swishing garment, and the panting breath followed me!

"In the utter darkness and silence of the solitary mountain pass, these mysterious sounds pursued me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST OF LACKLAND.

ALL is over now * * *
Pain, with its keen and poisoned fang,
The horror of the mortal pang,
The suffering look his brow had worn,
The fear, the strife, the anguish gone;
He sleeps at last in peace.

WHITTIER.

"OH, how I rejoiced when at the dawn of day I issued from that fearful mountain pass, and came down upon the shore of the open river, and saw the peaceful ferry-house beyond!

"I no longer heard the mysterious step, the swishing garment, and the panting breath, that had followed me all night through that dark and terrible gorge, chilling even my hot blood, and trying my hardened nerves.

"With the shades of night, too, all my superstitious horror had vanished, and I was inclined to think of my phantom follower as only the creation of a disturbed imagination.

"I walked down to the ferry-hut, found the horn, and blew it, and then called out:

"'BOAT!'

"I waited until I received the response:

"'All right! Coming!'

"And then, knowing that it would take the boatman some little time to come down from the house and get the skiff ready, I left the damp ferry-hut, and went out into the open air, and up the bank to a dry spot, where an aged hemlock tree grew; and being very tired I sat down at its foot and leaned back against its trunk.

"The sun was rising behind the Eagle Roost Ridge in the rear, and beginning to light up the sky and the river.

"I sat, gazing on the scene, thinking of the many years that had passed since I looked upon it last, and of all that had happened in the interval, thinking of the curse that had banished me so long, and of the awful force with which it had fallen upon me whenever I had ventured to return, and wondering if it would fall on me again, and when, and how it would do so.

"These gloomy thoughts came over me like a sudden cloud, and I bowed my head upon my hands.

"At that instant, and now in broad daylight, again I heard the mysterious footsteps, the swishing garment, and the panting breath.

"I raised my head to look, but in a moment I received a piercing, burning shock that sent me rolling on my face—a blow from a dagger, buried up to its hilt in my vitals.

"For an instant I saw the assassin standing over me with a face lighted up by the fires of insanity, with lips gibbering of revenge and triumph; and then, murmuring to myself:

"'It is my father's curse!' I lost consciousness. I never fully recovered my senses until this morning.

"Thus was the curse wrought out to its bitter end! Observe the sequence of events, Gerald! The first time I braved my father's curse by returning to my native country, I was met by a blasting disaster that tore from me my wife and child, and sent me, a raving maniac, flying from the scene.

"The second time I returned after fifteen years, I fell under the power of Satan, slew my fellow-man, was tried and convicted for murder, and narrowly escaped with my life henceforth ruined by remorse.

"The third time I attempted to come back I was shipwrecked in the *Zanzibar!*

"The fourth and last time I ventured to set foot on my native soil, I received my death-blow from the hand of an assassin, who was but the blind instrument of fate, the unconscious executioner of my father's sentence!"

With a strong and healthy opponent, Gerald Fitzgerald might have contested this point, but he felt it would be

useless and cruel to dispute with a dying man, on the subject of his monomania. He contented himself with asking, in a low and sympathetic tone:

"Who *was* this cowardly assassin, Arthur?"

"I may not tell you, Gerald. I do not wish to have the creature prosecuted."

"And yet there can be no doubt, in my mind, as to the identity of the murderess. I only asked you to name her, to confirm my own secret conviction," said Gerald Fitzgerald, gravely.

"Probably; yet moral conviction is not legal evidence, you know, and I decline to give, with my dying breath, the legal evidence the law would require to consign a poor, unhappy, irresponsible wretch to a prison or a gallows. Give me something, Gerald! I am fainting."

Fitzgerald complied with his request, and then arranged his pillows, and advised him to be still and rest for a little while.

"I will," murmured the fast-failing man; "but, meanwhile, go and tell my daughter who I am, and prepare her to see me."

"She will not need much preparation. Her heart has naturally yearned to you from the first. She has been your constant and devoted nurse ever since you were brought into the house," said Colonel Fitzgerald, gently.

"Heaven bless her! Now, then, go, dear Gerald."

Colonel Fitzgerald left the room, and went out into the hall, where he found Jess loitering near the door.

"Well, Marse Gerald, is yer all forgot your daily wittels? Dinner ready dis two hours," she said.

"Let it wait, Jess! And do you go in and sit by our patient until your young lady comes to take your place," said her master.

"Please you, answer me one thing, Marse Gerald! Has you foun' out who dat strange man is? Has he tell you his name? Or is he gwine die here on our hands, and we dem know nuffin' 'bout his people?" anxiously inquired Jess.

"He is among his own people and his nearest of kin now. Yes, Jess, I have found out who he is, and I will tell you in due time. Now go in and sit by our patient," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

The old woman passed into the sick room, and the colonel crossed the hall and entered the parlour, where he found Gertrude walking up and down the floor.

"How is he? How is he, Gerald?" she eagerly inquired, turning and hurrying to meet her husband.

"Come and sit down with me, my little love, I have much to say to you," spoke Colonel Fitzgerald, as he took her hand and gently led her to the sofa.

"Oh, Gerald, he has not gone—not gone yet?" she cried, when they were seated.

"No, no, my love; yet it cannot be long before he passes away. But I have something to tell you, my Gertrude! something very important to yourself," he answered, so gravely, that she raised her eyes to his in mute, earnest inquiry.

"It concerns this wounded man, my child."

"Yes, Gerald, I am all attention," she said.

"You take a very deep interest in him, Gertrude!"

"Oh, yes; yes, I do, indeed. I have from the first moment I met him on board the poor unlucky *Zanzibar!*"

"Did you never think it strange that you should feel so deep an interest in an ordinary stranger?"

"No! but then he never seemed like a stranger to me, and certainly not like an ordinary man, Gerald."

"But was it not very extraordinary that he should have had this effect upon you, my wife?"

"No—Oh, Gerald, was it wrong?" she inquired, with sudden anxiety.

"Why, no, my child, certainly not; it was quite right. And it was *natural*, more natural than you knew."

"You mean—you mean—Oh, *what* do you mean, Gerald?" she inquired, tremblingly.

"This man, Gertrude, is a very near relation of *mine*," said Gerald Fitzgerald.

"Oh, I am not surprised. He *does* look like you, Gerald! almost like enough to be your elder brother," she answered, with a grave smile.

"He is not quite of so near kin as that. But he is very near; he is my first cousin, the only son of my father's elder brother."

"GERALD!" exclaimed Gertrude, almost aghast.

"Well, my child! what thought has startled you so much?"

"Is he—is he—is he that unhappy one—that banished Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, so long supposed to be dead—that poor, lost Arthur, whom I have pitied with all my heart and soul ever since I first heard his tragic story?"

"Yes, love, the very same! Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald and Adam Lackland are one and the same. And it was his continued existence, when he lay under sentence of death at Washington, which was the secret told my father on his death-bed, by the mad woman Magdala, and which accelerated his death!"

"Oh, I understand it all now! And I understand the interest I felt in him," murmured Gertrude.

"Gertrude, there is another, and a nearer cause for that interest!"

"Gerald! why do you speak so solemnly? Oh! what more?"

"Calm yourself, my child, and answer me—Did you ever hear any one remark that you yourself bore a very strong family likeness to the Fitzgeralds?"

"Oh, yes, many people have said so. Oh, what are you about to tell me, Gerald?" she inquired with some prevision of the truth.

"You know, my precious one, you have heard the circumstances of your discovery and adoption by that excellent old man, Gabriel Haddon?"

"Oh, yes. I know that I was found in a cradle, stranded among the water-lilies, on the morning after the great flood, and that my parents were supposed to have been drowned," replied Gertrude.

"Yes! but they were not both drowned. Your mother was drowned, indeed. *You* were naturally believed to have been drowned, and your poor father, maddened by a double bereavement, believing himself also to be pursued by a curse, fled the country and became a wanderer over the face of the earth. Only recently he heard that his daughter still lives, and only within a week he returned to this neighbourhood to claim her, and to claim his inheritance, for her sake. Gertrude, can you divine *now* what near and dear cause you have to feel a deathless interest in yon dying man?"

"Oh, Gerald! Gerald! He is—he is—"

"Your father! Yes, Gertrude, you have divined the

truth. And your *heart* received it before your mind could understand it. Do not weep so, dear," he said, as she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"But, oh, Gerald, to meet him at last only in this way!" she answered, with a wild burst of sorrow.

He drew her head upon his bosom, where she sobbed until the storm of grief had exhausted itself. Then she lifted up her face and wiped her eyes.

"That is right, my brave little girl. Compose yourself for your father's sake, for he is waiting for you, and you must go to him as soon as you are calm enough to do so. Now, in the meanwhile let me tell you something that may serve to help you by diverting your thoughts. Your mother—do you feel no interest in hearing who she was?"

"Oh, yes! indeed, *indeed*, I do. My poor mother! lost so young—lost in the same way in which I was supposed to have been. Tell me of my mother, but tell me quickly, dear Gerald, for I must go to my poor father, who has not many hours to live," said Gertrude, drying her eyes, and trying so hard to compose herself that her efforts defeated the end.

"Your mother, my little lady, was no other than Magdala Haddon, the lost daughter of Gabriel Haddon and of his lovely wife, Lilian Vale!"

"Heaven of heavens!" muttered Gertrude, clasping her hands and turning pale with emotion.

"So that old Gabriel Haddon, who taught you to call him 'grandfather,' was indeed, and in truth, your grandfather, though the fact was unknown to him and to you," added Gerald Fitzgerald.

Gertrude made no reply; but sat with her hands clasped upon her lap, gazing straight before her, as if in a deep reverie. At last she looked up and inquired:

"And Magdala, that strange, unhappy woman, who went by my mother's strange Christian name! What had Magdala to do with all this?"

"I will tell you later, Gertrude. It is a long story, and I have not time to give it to you now. Besides, I have much more to tell you—the circumstances of your father's marriage with your mother, and many other matters which must be deferred to a more convenient season. Are you calm enough to go to your father, now, my child?"

"Oh, yes, Gerald," she answered, as she arose from her seat. He attended her to the door of the sick room, opened it, admitted her, and then closed it behind her.

During the preceding interview, not one word had been said by either Gerald or Gertrude, of the great change of fortune that had come to the latter through her inheritance of her present vast estates. It is doubtful if either of them thought of it at the time.

As Gertrude entered the sick room, old Jess, anxious about her cookery, and glad to be relieved from her post of duty, arose and crossed the room and passed out.

Gertrude approached the bedside.

The dying man, who had seemed to be sleeping, divined her approach, and turned his fading eyes towards her, and held out his failing hands to receive her.

She went and sank on her knees at his bedside, and took his outstretched hands, and pressed them to her lips and to her bosom, while her tears fell fast.

"My little daughter—my little daughter,"—he whispered, "you now—know all—"

"Yes, yes, my father—" murmured Gertrude, amid low sobs, that she tried hard to suppress—"yes—all! And I love you—I love you dearly—"

"My little Gertrude," faintly gasped the fainting man, as he feebly withdrew his hand from her hold to lay it on her bowed head.

"I pitied you, dear father—I pitied you, as Arthur Fitzgerald, all my life, before I ever saw you!—I pitied you from the depths of my heart. And I loved you as Adam Lackland, the first moment I ever met you on board the *Zanzibar*," breathed the kneeling girl, amid the kisses and tears she lavished on his hand.

"My little angel! *Only* angels love and pity the lost! My little daughter—I would bless you—if I was worthy to do so," he panted.

"Oh, bless me, my father! bless your child! Let her not live unprotected by her father's blessing," pleaded Gertrude, still lowlier bowing her head.

"May the Lord bless you, my daughter! May the Lord bless you!" he breathed, with his hands upon her bent head.

And so they remained for a few seconds, and then the fast sinking man whispered in a changed voice—

"*Rise.*" Gertrude rose and bent over him.

His face had altered fearfully. The darkness of death had descended upon it.

"Father! Father!" she whispered, "shall I call Gerald?"

"Yes," he murmured so low that she had to bend her ear to hear the word.

Swiftly and silently she glided from the room, and passed into the parlour, where she found Colonel Fitzgerald walking slowly and thoughtfully up and down the floor; for even he could not sit still while Arthur Fitzgerald was dying in the next room.

"Gerald, his last moment is at hand. He has asked for you. Come," she whispered in a broken voice.

He silently took her hand and drew it within his own, and supported her tottering steps back to the sick-room and to the death-bed.

"Are—you—both here?" inquired Arthur Fitzgerald, with low gasps, for sight and breath were both going.

"We are both here," answered Gerald, for Gertrude could not speak for weeping.

"Join—your hands—and put them—in mine!" panted the parting spirit.

Gerald took Gertrude's hand and put it, with his own, in that of Arthur Fitzgerald.

The latter closed his fingers on both, and gasped:

"Gerald—be good—to her!"

"I will, as I hope Heaven to save me," fervently replied Fitzgerald.

"The Lord—bless you—both—"

The last words were scarcely audible, for with the last syllable the suffering spirit fell into that brief, delicious sleep from which he would awaken in the higher life.

"All is over, my darling," said Gerald Fitzgerald, in a low and reverent tone, as he tenderly closed the eyes of the body.

There was no outburst of grief from Gertrude now. She was sensitive to the peaceful sphere of the sleeping spirit, and awed and calmed by it.

She let her husband lead her from the room in silence, and then she sought her own quiet chamber to pray in secret.

Colonel Fitzgerald returned alone to the bed of death,

straightened the body, smoothed the bed covering, closed the blinds and darkened the room; and having made every thing decent and in order he passed out, locking the door behind him and putting the key in his pocket.

"How is de poor ge'm'an by dis time, Marse Gerald?" inquired Jess, who came out of the kitchen to put the question.

"He is well by this time, I hope, Jess. That is to say, he has passed away," answered Colonel Fitzgerald.

"What you say, Marse Ger'ld, gone?" exclaimed Jess, in awe.

"Yes, gone."

"Den, hadn't me and Het better go in dere and 'tend to the body?"

"No, not yet. All is done that is needed at present. And the body must remain undisturbed until the arrival of parties whom I have summoned to identify it, and indeed, until the coroner's inquest has been held."

"Oh, Marse Ger'ld, must dere be a crowner's quest in dis yer 'spectable house?" inquired the scandalised Jessie.

"Yes, Jess. If it were a king's palace instead of a humble ferry-house, the inquest would have to be held over the murdered man all the same," gravely replied Colonel Fitzgerald, as he passed on to the parlour, which was now vacant, and where he sat down at old Gabriel Haddon's antique writing-desk, and wrote two letters, one to the county coroner, notifying him of the death of the murdered man, and asking an immediate inquest, and another to the village undertaker, saying that his services were required at Haddon's Ferry.

These notes he sent off by John Brooks, who was now the only messenger left at the ferry—Jubal having been sent to summon Dr. Goodwin and Dr. Shaw, and Hannibal to fetch Miss Maxima Rowley, Mr. Royal Greenleaf, and Mr. Ben Bowers.

Having dispatched this urgent business, Gerald Fitzgerald went upstairs to sit with Gertrude, whom he found reading from the open Bible on the table before her. She was very calm.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CROWD AT HADDON'S FERRY.

NOTHING in his life
So became him as his leaving it.
SHAKESPEARE.

IT was late in the afternoon when the summoned parties began to arrive at Haddon's Ferry.

First came Dr. Goodwin and Dr. Shaw.

Colonel Fitzgerald received them, and took them into the parlour.

"What is this terrible thing I hear, Fitzgerald, of Adam Lackland's unexpected return and assassination?" demanded the rector in an agitated voice.

"You have heard the truth, Dr. Goodwin. The man whom we have known as Adam Lackland was three days ago waylaid and assassinated on the opposite side of the ferry," gravely replied Gerald Fitzgerald.

"Gracious Heaven! Is the wound likely to prove fatal?" inquired the horror-stricken minister.

"It *has* proved fatal. The wounded man passed away at two o'clock this afternoon."

"You shock me beyond measure, Gerald!" exclaimed the rector, dropping into the arm-chair, drawing out his handkerchief and wiping his forehead.

"We have all been deeply affected by the catastrophe," added Dr. Shaw.

"Has the cowardly assassin been arrested?" inquired the agitated rector.

"No, nor has any warrant been issued for such an arrest. No one is known, or even suspected, as the murderer; and justice cannot issue a warrant against some

person or persons unknown. We waited for the wounded man to recover his consciousness, so that we might take his deposition under oath. He only came to himself this morning, about six hours before his death, and then he absolutely declined to name his murderer," Colonel Fitzgerald explained.

"What infatuation! Upon what ground did he decline to do this act of justice?" demanded Dr. Shaw.

Colonel Fitzgerald shook his head.

"The wounded victim was not very explicit as to his reasons for declining," he said.

"Some notion of Christian charity and forbearance, exaggerated by his own extremity, I suppose," said Dr. Shaw.

"Well," said Dr. Goodwin, "tell us this! Was he able to throw any light on the mysteries that have bewildered us so long? You understand what I mean, Fitzgerald?"

"Oh, yes, I understand you, of course. And I am gratified to assure you that he has thrown a whole flood of light on that darkness; and in the first place by declaring that his true name was not Lackland, but something else."

"How? Not Lackland?" exclaimed the rector and the physician, in a breath.

"No."

"Who was he, then?" demanded Dr. Goodwin.

"I will tell you later. The law requires something more than the dying man's declaration as to his own identity, as the owner of vast estates which he is to transmit to his heir. It requires that his word shall be supported by the testimony of others who have personally known him under the name he claims, and can identify him as the man he assumes to be. For this reason I have sent to summon certain parties to view the body. As for myself, I am free to declare that, although I never knew the man under the name that he claims as his own, yet I have not the slightest doubt that he is the person he represents himself to be," said Colonel Fitzgerald, gravely.

"And the rightful owner of a considerable estate in this county, did you say, Fitzgerald?" inquired Dr. Goodwin, while Dr. Peter Shaw listened attentively.

"Yes; therefore you see the urgent necessity of his being identified beyond all possibility of question," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"And here come your witnesses, Gerald, if I mistake not!" exclaimed Dr. Goodwin, as the travelling carriage from the Summit drew up with a party of ladies and gentlemen, who, as they alighted, were seen to be Miss Maxima Rowley, Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, Mr. Royal Greenleaf, and Mr. Benjamin Bowers.

Colonel Fitzgerald went out to meet them.

"What is this matter of life and death upon which you have summoned us, Gerald? Who is this man the coachman tells us of, who has been waylaid, and robbed, and murdered, and brought to the ferry-house to die? And what have *we* to do with such very irregular proceedings?" querulously inquired Miss Maxima Rowley, sorely divided between her self-conceit and her inquisitiveness.

"You are required to identify the murdered man, who is a gentleman and near relative of your own, Aunt Maxima," mercilessly replied Colonel Fitzgerald.

Miss Rowley uttered a half-suppressed shriek, and then drew herself up and took herself secretly to task for betraying such a weakness.

"Who is he, then?" she tartly demanded.

"That you will have to tell us. We do not know who he is, but only who he claims to be."

"Who does he claim to be, then?"

"We must not tell you. We must not suggest anything to you. We must await your own spontaneous recognition," replied Gerald Fitzgerald, as he turned to welcome Mrs. Doy and the other visitors.

"Oh, Gerald!" exclaimed Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, as soon as he had greeted her. "Oh, Gerald, so many things have happened to upset me within the last three days. The unexpected return of your wife, and her appearance at the church on the wedding-day, of all days in the world!"

"Better than to have put in an appearance on the day after the wedding, was't it?" exclaimed Royal Greenleaf, as he heartily shook the hand that Gerald offered him.

"Oh, a thousand times better! Oh, infinitely better! —Good Heaven!" responded Mrs. Doy. "But it would have been best of all, if she could have come weeks or

months beforehand! What a horrid shock it was to the poor bride-elect!—"

"It would have been a horridder one to the wife of a week or a day, wouldn't it?" demanded the merciless Mr. Greenleaf.

"Oh, hush, hush, Roy! You shock me beyond all measure! And now this poor murdered man, brought here to die, and saying that he is a relation of ours—"

"Like one of your novels, isn't it, Doy?" demanded her sarcastic brother.

"Oh, Roy, *do* be quiet! Gerald, is the poor man really fatally wounded? And can nothing be done for him? Is he truly a relation of ours, or only some poor pretender?"

"He is truly a relation of ours, and his wounds have already proved fatal," answered Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Oh, Gerald, the poor soul! Who is he, then?"

"One who has long been missing, long supposed to be dead, and whose body you are required to identify, if you can."

"But who is he?"

"That you are required to tell us, if you can; but your recognition, to be of the greatest value, must be spontaneous, not suggested."

"I wonder, now, if he is not that lost black sheep, Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald?" said Mr. Ben Bowers, accidentally hitting on the exact truth, although he did not know it at the time.

"I cannot tell you of my own knowledge. I never knew Arthur Fitzgerald before he went away," replied Gerald Fitzgerald, as he led the party into the parlour, where they shook hands with the rector and the physician, and then sat down.

Colonel Fitzgerald went to the door communicating with the kitchen and called old Jess, telling her to take the ladies to some spare room where they could lay off their bonnets and cloaks.

Jess came to the door, caught a glimpse of the company, and retreating into the privacy of her kitchen, raised up both hands in consternation, muttering:

"De Lors a messy on my poor ole soul! Young Marse Gerald go and 'vite all dese ladies an' ge'm'en to de house, 'out sayin' one word 'bout it to me, and no supper

'vided for um! Well, Lor! Young men *is* de debbil! and de mos' unreasonablest an' unthoughtfulest creeturs in dis worl'! But what can you 'spect? 'You can't put ole shoulders on young heads,' as de ole sayin' say. Heap ov sense in dese ole sayin's, an' de longer I lib de more I knows it! Umph, umph! Won't Miss Gertrude hab to train him out of his free and easy camp manners? Hush, honey! But, Lors, *she* ain't a gwine to train him! She's jes' a gwine to let him hab his own way! An' dat's de ruination ob any man. Dey can't stan' it; de poor, ignorant he creeturs 'quire to be trained! 'Cause what dey know?"

And so grumbling, old Jess proceeded to make herself tidy to come into the parlour and wait on the ladies.

She entered, courtesying, and stood silently and respectfully waiting to attend them.

"Show me where I can take off my bonnet and put on my cap—if there is any decent room in this wretched barn," said Miss Maxima Rowley, rising.

This put Jess in a rage, but she controlled her temper and answered, with quiet malice:

"Sartain, Miss. I will 'duct yer to de bes' room we hab got at our 'sposal, which is not de werry bes' in de house, 'cause de 'ceased ge'man hab got dat; nor likewise de second bes', 'cause de young madame, Mrs. Gerl' Fitzgerl', hab gone dere to lie down and depose, an' can't be 'sturbed."

"Hold your tongue, you impertinent fool, and do your duty!" exclaimed the irate old lady.

Jess tucked her tongue in her cheek, and led the way upstairs to a very plainly furnished back bedroom, where there was not even a fire on this bleak February day.

"This is perfectly outrageous! Why is there not a fire here?" sharply demanded the shivering Miss Maxima.

"'Cause I wasn't 'spectin' company, nor likewise 'pared for 'em, 'sides habin' a great deal to do along ob all de trouble we was in," answered Jess.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Doy, kindly. "Of course Gerald had a great deal to think of, and forgot to apprise Jess, and the poor thing had a great deal to do, as she has said."

"Yes; but where was that jade of a ferry-girl, that she could not have made a fire here?" scornfully demanded Miss Maxima. Jess's black eyes began to snap.

"Who mought yer be talkin' 'bout, Miss?" she inquired, with ironical respect.

"That creature he foolishly married. She's not too good, I suppose, to wait on ladies," said Miss Maxima, contemptuously. Jess drew her sword and threw away the scabbard (so to speak.)

"*You* talk about *my* mist'ess dat way, yer 'licious pizen old maid you! *You* talk 'bout de young madam dat way? *You* dare to call Mrs. Gerl' Fitzger'l' a creetur? She ain't no more ob a creetur dan you is, yerse'f! nor ha'f as much! It's *you* is de creetur', and a horrid ugly ole creetur' at dat, what no man could eber be suaded to marry eben for yer money! It's *you* is de creetur', and she is de lady! *You* jes' let Marse Colonel Fitzger'l' hear you call de young madam a creetur', and he'll show you de outside ob de door, Miss, quicker'n you eber seed it done in yer life! Marse Colonel is a perfect gem'an, an' mighty perlite to ladies, but he won't stand no nonsense where de young madam is 'cerned, I tell yer good. I 'vises yer to be berry spectful to young Mrs. Geral' Fitzger'l', if yer knows what's good for yer—so dere!"

While Jess poured forth this torrent of indignation, Miss Maxima Rowley stood aghast with astonishment, and dumb with rage. She, before whom all the slaves on her plantation trembled with abject fear to stand and hear such inconceivable insolence from the black servant of the ferry-house. She was really so confounded she did not know what to do or say. She would have liked to order off Jess to instant execution by burning at the stake, if she had had the power. She was tempted to knock old Jess down where she stood, and jump upon her and stamp her to death, if such a proceeding would not have been both undignified and dangerous. Any lighter way than these of punishing such unheard of impudence seemed to her both puerile and futile.

"I—I shall report this to your master," she muttered, in a voice choked with suppressed rage.

"Oh, *do!* *Please* do now! Don't 'frain on my 'count! 'Port it to Marse Colonel Fitzger'l'. Tell him what a

good settin' down I gib yer for speakin' disrespec'ful ob de young madam! And den see how he'll 'ceive it," said Jess, with the most polite irony.

"Come, Aunt Maxima, let us go downstairs. We shall catch cold if we remain here," said Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, who had taken no part in the controversy, but indeed with mild tact had ignored the whole thing.

"Yes, this is no place for me! I will have that black demon—I will have her—I will have her—drawn and quartered!" sputtered Miss Rowley, as she left the room, followed by the derisive laughter of old Jesse.

When the two ladies re-entered the parlour, they found the gentlemen deep in the discussion of the mysterious assassination.

Gerald Fitzgerald had given them the facts, as far as he had learned them from John Brooks, the boatman, who had been the first to discover the murder, and who had seen the unknown woman jump up from the side of the wounded man, and disappear in the woods behind him. He also related the circumstances of his own seeking and finding the victim, and bringing him to the ferry-house.

But he withheld for the present, the statement made him by Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald on his death-bed.

As the ladies entered, the conversation ceased.

Colonel Fitzgerald arose and placed chairs for them, and then turning to Mr. Greenleaf, said:

"Well, Royal, will you be the first to view the body, and see if you could identify it?"

"Yes, certainly, certainly," exclaimed Roy, jumping up on the *qui vive* of curiosity.

"Follow me, then," said Gerald.

They left the parlour and crossed the hall. Gerald Fitzgerald unlocked the room of death, and they passed in.

"It is as a vault! Let us have a light," whispered Royal Greenleaf, who, coming from the sunny hall into the shaded room, could see nothing but the white bed, with the dim outline of a long human form under the counterpane.

Colonel Fitzgerald opened the window shutters, letting in a flood of light, and then went to the bedside, silently followed by Royal Greenleaf.

Gerald reverently turned down the white coverlet and revealed the calmly sleeping face.

"Good Lord! It is Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald! Poor, poor fellow!" exclaimed Royal Greenleaf, in an awe-stricken tone.

"You recognize him?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald, in a low whisper.

"I could swear to him on a pile of Bibles as high as a haystack!" responded Mr. Greenleaf.

"That is well. Ask no questions now, my dear Roy. Later, I shall have something to tell you. Go to the window, my good fellow, and sit there. Make no sign. I must bring in other witnesses, whose recognition must be as spontaneous as your own," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he reverently covered the calm face.

Mr. Royal Greenleaf took the indicated seat, while Colonel Fitzgerald left the room, and presently returned with Miss Maxima Rowley on his arm.

He led the old lady to the bedside, turned down the coverlet and revealed the quiet sleeper.

"Do you know this face, Aunt Rowley?" inquired Gerald Fitzgerald.

"Of course I do!" snapped Miss Rowley. "It is the face of that good-for-nothing Arty Fitzgerald! I thought the devil had got him long ago; but I knew he would come to a bad end at last!"

"I am very sorry to hear you speak so uncharitably, madam," said Colonel Fitzgerald, coldly, as he led her to a seat near the other.

He then left the room and returned with Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, who, on seeing the face, exclaimed:

"It is our poor Arthur Fitzgerald! Oh, my poor boy! Oh, my poor boy!" and forgetting all the years that had passed, and seeing before her only the playmate of her infancy — the companion of her girlhood, she fell weeping over his body.

When Mrs. Doy was sufficiently composed, Colonel Fitzgerald gave her a seat, and went out to bring in in succession, other witnesses, all of whom, each in his turn, at sight, recognized the body of the murdered man as that of the long missing heir of the Summit Manor, Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GERTRUDE'S FORTUNE.

So, a loving consort made he,
And her gentle mind was such,
That she grew a noble lady,
And her people loved her much.
TENNYSON.

"FRIENDS, there can be no question as to the identity of this unfortunate man. This is the body of our missing relative, Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, late of Summit Manor," said Colonel Fitzgerald, gravely, as for the last time he covered the face of the dead.

"No doubt of it in the world!" exclaimed Ben Bowers, bluffly.

"But I say, Gerald, my boy, haven't you taken a vast deal of pains to disinherit yourself? It is a hard case for you, if this man should prove to have been married and left heirs," said Royal Greenleaf, sympathetically.

"I have my profession," said Colonel Fitzgerald, with a peculiar smile.

"Profession of arms, by which no one ever gets rich, unless indeed he should marry an heiress—which, by the way, a soldier is very apt to do! The girls love the uniform, and all 'the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious'—dress parade! But that chance is gone for you, my dear fellow, who are already Benedick, the married man."

"But how do you know that I have not married an heiress?" gravely inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"What? in lovely little Gertrude, fair and sweet as the water-lilies among which she was found? She is

'Heir of all her father's virtue,
Heir of all her mother's grace,'

no doubt, whoever they may have been; but she is heiress of nothing else, unless it should be of Haddon's Ferry, in case old Gabriel's lost daughter should never be found."

"Yes, but old Gabriel's lost daughter has been found," quietly responded Gerald Fitzgerald.

"In that case I hope that Arthur Fitzgerald has never been married, or that he has never left an heir; for if you are disinherited from your uncle's estate, you will have nothing left but your colonel's pay, and what is that compared to the princely revenues of the Summit Manor?"

"But Arthur Fitzgerald has been married, and has an heir. He married that very lost daughter of Gabriel Haddon, and left one only child, an heiress, my wife, Gertrude."

"Eh!"

"*What!*"

"GOOD HEAVEN!"

"*The deuce you say?*"

"I DON'T BELIEVE ONE WORD OF IT!"

Such were the exclamations that burst simultaneously from the lips of all present. The last rude denial came from the angular Miss Maxima Rowley.

"Friends," said Colonel Fitzgerald, who felt that this discussion would be unseemly in the chamber of death, "permit me to attend you to the parlour, where Dr. Goodwin and Dr. Shaw await us, and where we will lay before you the most indubitable evidence of the facts I have stated."

And he went to the door, opened it, and held it open until the company had all passed out.

Then he carefully closed and locked up the death-room, and followed them into the parlour, where he found them already seated around the centre table, at which also sat the rector and the physician.

"Dr. Goodwin, will you be so kind as to act as revelator on this occasion, and give our assembled friends and kinsfolk an account of your quest in search of Gabriel

Haddon's lost daughter, and its issue?" said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he took his seat among them.

The rector bowed, and in a low, earnest and distinct voice commenced the long narrative of the search and discoveries with which the reader is already made familiar.

At the "proper" places in his narrative, and in support of his statement, he produced family correspondence and miniatures, certificates of marriage, of birth and of baptism, and all other necessary documents to prove what was now the only point at issue—namely, that Gertrude Fitzgerald was the only daughter and sole heiress of her father, Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, and of his wife, Magdala Haddon; that besides being, through her father, heiress of the great Summit Manor, she was, through her mother, the heiress of the Mountain Manor, Hill Top Hall, Cave Court, Wood Lodge, Stoney Isle, and Haddon's Ferry.

"I congratulate you, Gerald. I congratulate you with all my heart!" exclaimed Royal Greenleaf, boisterously, starting up and seizing and shaking the hand of his friend.

"Thanks, Roy; but calm yourself. You forget what lies in the next room," murmured Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Soh, soh!" muttered Royal Greenleaf, sobering down; "but I *must* congratulate you; you have married the richest heiress in Wilde county, after all!"

"'The richest heiress in Wilde county,' indeed! Why, she is the richest heiress in the Western hemisphere, I do believe!" added Mr. Ben Bowers.

"Yes, Lord! 'The meek shall inherit the earth,' and she has a good part of it!" reverently ejaculated old Jess, who had been an unnoticed, but triumphant auditor of the whole story.

"The best of it is, that he married this wealthy heiress quite unconsciously, believing her to be rich only in beauty and goodness," added Royal Greenleaf, admiringly.

"I believe he knew all about it all the time, and that was the reason why he threw over Geraldine," spitefully exclaimed Miss Maxima Rowley.

Colonel Fitzgerald took no sort of notice of this false charge, but Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, speaking now for the first time, sighed forth:

"Ah, poor Geraldine! she will now be quite a pauper! I knew, indeed, that her father only came in possession of the Mountain Manor on the death of Lilian Vale, who was supposed to have died without heirs, but I never thought his daughter would lose it through the turning up of an heir. However, since an heir *had* to turn up, I am glad it is that lovely girl Gertrude, rather than another."

"Geraldine may quietly give up her rightful inheritance to an impostor if she pleases. I do not think she will please to do so; but, in any case, I shall not give up Hill Top Hall. Possession is nine points of the law, and I will hold on to my estate, and contest the pretender's claim to it, through every court in the State before I will give it up!" savagely exclaimed Miss Maxima, as she started to her feet and began to stride up and down the floor.

"My dear Aunt Maxima, you have no case. There is not a lawyer on the rolls desperate enough to take your brief. However, you may rest easy. I am sure that I can speak in the name of my beloved wife, and promise that you shall not be disturbed in the possession of Hill Top Hall during the short remainder of your natural life," said Colonel Fitzgerald, kindly but firmly.

"And do you think that *I* will consent to such a compromise as *that?* To live on my own manor simply as *your* dependent and *hers*? No! I'll contend for my rights through every court in the realm," said the old Amazon, furiously.

"As you please, madam. Let us drop the subject at present. Here comes the coroner," said Gerald Fitzgerald, as he heard a carriage drive up to the door.

"Gerald, do tell me, where all this time is Gertrude, that she does not make her appearance?" inquired Mrs. Doy.

"My dear lady, Gertrude has been watching beside her father day and night for the last three days. She was quite worn out this morning, yet, from nervous excitement she was unable to sleep. I gave her a composing draught and sent her to lie down. She is sleeping, now, unconscious of the visitors who are in the house; and, indeed, if you will kindly take her place towards our guests, I should prefer that she should sleep until after the inquest shall be over and the house restored to quiet."

"Of course, Gerald, I will be pleased to do all I can to serve you. Will the inquest take a long time?"

"Scarcely an hour, I should think."

And with a bow to Mrs. Doy, Gerald went out to meet the coroner, whom Jubal had just admitted into the hall.

With the coroner, Dr. Pickard, was old Squire Rawlins, a Justice of the Peace, who had left his office in Wildeville to come and take the deposition of the dying man, who, he that morning learned from the attending physician, had returned to his consciousness, but who, as he afterwards learned from the coroner, had since died; so the worthy magistrate came now, not to take the deposition of the dying, but to assist at the inquest of the dead.

Colonel Fitzgerald met the two gentlemen with great courtesy, and conducted them into the parlour.

Soon after the coroner, arrived men from Wildeville and the neighbourhood, who had been hastily summoned to sit on the jury. The inquest was held in the chamber of death, where the body was viewed and the testimony taken.

Royal Greenleaf, Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, Mr. Benjamin Bowers, Miss Maxima Rowley, and Dr. Able Goodwin, were called in succession, and identified the body of the murdered man as that of the long-missing Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald.

Colonel Gerald Fitzgerald was next called, and testified to the facts of having discovered the body before life was extinct, and caused it to be conveyed to the ferry-house, where three days later death ensued.

Dr. Peter Shaw testified as to the nature and extent of the wound, and the cause of death.

Here the dagger that had been drawn from the back of the wounded man was shown; but no one could identify that as the property of any one they knew, or an instrument that they had ever seen before.

This was the sum total of the testimony taken.

The witnesses and other outsiders here all withdrew, and left the coroner and jury to their deliberations.

Colonel Fitzgerald found himself alone with Mr. Royal Greenleaf. He took his arm, and walked with him out of the house, and down towards the ferry, saying, as they went along:

"Ever since last Tuesday, my dear Royal, I have been very anxious to receive some intelligence of my Cousin Geraldine; yet I have felt a certain delicacy in making inquiries for her. Have you anything to tell me?"

"Well, you see, Gerald, when I heard what had happened from Father Dubarry, I never was so confoundedly cut up in my life! You know it was right there, in the middle aisle of the church, and we were actually on our way to the altar, where we saw you and your attendants waiting for us."

"At that moment I knew nothing of Gertrude's return. I was as completely in ignorance on that subject, as yourselves," put in Gerald Fitzgerald.

"You must have been, for you looked quite unmoved. Well, there we were marching up the aisle of the church, with the eyes of the whole congregation on us, as they will ever be on a bridal procession. Geraldine was on my arm, you know, and her train of bridesmaids behind her, and I confess I felt proud of my beautiful ward as I heard the whispered comments of admiration as we passed.

"'What a queenly creature,' said some.

"'What a magnificent dress,' said others, and so forth.

"In the midst of this, came down to meet us Father Dubarry, with a face like death. I could not imagine what could have happened."

"I witnessed that movement, and was as much perplexed by it as you could have been," said the Colonel.

"Well, Father Dubarry, with the eyes of all the congregation on him, watching and wondering, drew me aside and whispered:

"'Something has just occurred that must stop the marriage. For Heaven's sake take Miss Fitzgerald home at once. I will follow you to explain all within an hour. The bishop will dismiss the congregation.'

"'But, great Jupiter!' I began, '*what* has happened? Who is dead? Does Gerald know? Why doesn't he come and explain himself?'

"But Father Dubarry stopped me by saying, with authority:

"'I said that I would follow in an hour and explain all. Take Miss Fitzgerald home without an instant's delay.'

"Then, turning to Geraldine, who had stood an amazed and perplexed spectator of this whispered colloquy, he said, with a commanding gesture:—'My daughter, ask no questions, but go home at once with your guardian.'

"Now you know Geraldine would as soon put her beautiful head into the fire as disobey her spiritual director. So she permitted me to lead her out of the church, followed by the eyes of the whole wondering congregation."

"All that I saw with as much amazement and perplexity as could have been felt by any of the congregation," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Well, I took Geraldine and her bridesmaids to the carriage and crowded them in. These last mentioned young ladies were not silent, I do assure you, but chattered away at a great rate:—'Who can it be?' 'Colonel Fitzgerald has no very near relatives,' and so on.

"For, you see, both bride and bridesmaids had quite settled it that some unexpected death had occurred to delay the wedding. I left them with all their tongues going like mill-clappers, and I went and brought my astonished and bewildered sisters out of the church, and put *them* into our own old family carriage to take them home. They, too, inundated me with questions, but, of course, I could not answer them.

"At last we got to Greenwood, where the next thing we did was to astonish the household, who opened their eyes to the widest extent to see the bride returning without the bridegroom.

"But they were quickly enlightened by the self-deceived young bridesmaids, who spread through the house their own theory of the strangely interrupted wedding.

"'Colonel Fitzgerald has received the news of the sudden death of a dear friend,' they said, with one accord, excepting my wild niece, Patricia, who maliciously burst out with a theory that she herself would not have credited, though it was the true one.

"'I don't believe it is a death at all,' she said; 'it is a resurrection! There. His first wife has turned up!'"

"Did Patricia really say that?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"She really did; but we none of us paid much attention to her remark, so far was such a possibility from our

thoughts. And fortunately, Geraldine did not hear it, for she had retired to her own apartment to await *your* arrival, as she confidently expected you to return with Father Dubarry.

"Well, Gerald, punctually to his promise, the priest came within an hour after our arrival. *But he came alone*, of course, and he asked to see me alone. I took him to my private apartment, and there he astounded me with the intelligence that your wife, Gertrude, had returned, as it were, raised from the dead. And he nearly finished me by asking me to break the news to Miss Fitzgerald.

"I told him I would march up to a battery, rush into a burning building, or into a lion's den, in the service of my fellow-creatures if called upon to do so; but face Miss Fitzgerald with such news as that, I could not and would not, even at the call of duty!

"Then Father Dubarry inquired whether one of my sisters would not undertake the task, hinting at the same time that the ill news might be conveyed more tenderly and gracefully by a sympathetic woman than by a man.

"I agreed with him! I would have agreed to anything rather than to the proposal that *I* should personate the bird of ill omen.

"I sent for Sue and Doy, and gave them the overwhelming news. They were stupefied and dumbfounded by it. They remained staring at us in silent apathy until the proposal was made that one or the other of them should go to Geraldine with the news that the wife of her bridegroom-expectant had, as it were, been cast up by the sea in which she was supposed to have been buried twelve months before, and returned to her husband.

"Here Sue turned white as a sheet, and shook her head in silence, while Doy put up both hands in deprecation, and declared that she would rather bite her own tongue off than make it the bearer of such humiliating news.

"Then, Gerald, I spoke up, and told Father Dubarry that surely *he*, in his character of clergyman and as Miss Fitzgerald's spiritual director and oldest friend, was the most proper person to break the news to her; that she would need both comfort and control, and that he could both console and direct her.

"Father Dubarry visibly shrank from the task; but on

him duty had a paramount claim, and he consented, though unwillingly, to undertake it.

"I sent a message to Geraldine, asking her to receive Father Dubarry. She returned a favourable answer, and the good man arose with a sigh, crossed himself, and went up to her.

"'It will kill Geraldine,' said my sister Sue.

"'Or craze her,' added Doy. Considering Geraldine's condition during the last twelve months, I shared their apprehensions.

"An hour of the deepest anxiety passed, and then Father Dubarry came with a face so free from care, that the very sight of it relieved us from anxiety.

"'She bears it like a hero!' said the good man, as he entered the room. 'She says it is all for the best.'

"We all expressed our pleasure at hearing this, and soon after, Father Dubarry took his leave.

"Then, I confess, my misgivings on Geraldine's account returned. I begged my two sisters to go to her at once, and they went. The truth is, I feared that Geraldine's pride caused her to make a show of courage that she did not feel.

"I was not at all prepared for what next happened. Geraldine came down and joined us at dinner. Her face was a little paler than usual, that was all the difference to be seen in her.

"Later in the day I had an interview with my ward. She told me that she really thought everything had happened for the best. To my utter amazement she told me that she had not lately cared very much for her Cousin Gerald, though a feeling of the old kindness and a certain sense of conventional of fitness had induced her to consent to the marriage. Now that it was forever at an end, she felt relieved, for she was sure that a much higher destiny awaited her.

"Gerald, I was half glad, and half disgusted, if you can understand such a state of feeling. I was glad for her sake that she suffered so little, and I was disgusted with myself to think what a fool I had been to believe that she had ever suffered at all! Well, Gerald, after what I have told you, you will be prepared to hear what follows."

"What was that?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Why, the next morning I brought her a letter from the post-office, which proved to be from that pretty little French lady—Madame—Madame—Delaplatte—Devilette, what the deuce was it?"

"Madame de La Vallette, do you mean?"

"Yes, that was the name. Well, the little French lady and her husband are in Washington again. He has some diplomatic appointment there. Madame is *triste* (whatever that may mean) without her *chere* Gerald. In a word, as I afterwards learned from my sister, Madame de La Vallette had invited Miss Fitzgerald to come and pay her a visit in Washington. Geraldine accepted the invitation, and with her French maid and footman, she left Greenwood for the city yesterday morning."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Well, Gerald, you never *were* a coxcomb; I'll say that for you, my boy; and so perhaps you will also be glad to hear that there is a distinguished admirer of Geraldine staying with the French family—that big behemoth of a German or Russian prince with the jaw-breaking name—Prince—Prince—well, there, I give it up! I could not pronounce that name unless I had a very severe catarrh in the head and throat, for it is made up of a hiccough, a wheeze, a sneeze, and a cough. But you know his name?"

"No, I have forgotten it," said Gerald, indifferently.

"Well, it doesn't matter. He was the same fellow who was down here after Geraldine last summer, when she rejected him; but, Lord bless you, that elephant was so far gone that she has only to smile on him to bring him to her feet again. And she'll do it, mind you! Putting one thing with another, her talk about a 'higher destiny' awaiting her, and her acceptance of the French lady's invitation, knowing that Prince Sneeze-my-cough-off was also her guest—you may depend, Miss Fitzgerald in a few months will cast off the chrysalis of her plain Republican name, and come out like a butterfly, Princess Kough-my-cowld-off, or whatever it is!"

"I should be very glad to hear of it," said Gerald.

"Yes, and he'll be the very fellow for her. He'll receive her outbursts of furious temper as General Jackson received the British cannonading at New Orleans—with bales of cotton."

"That is to say, when she rages most violently, he with his German philosophy and—phlegm, will go into his study or his garden, and read Goethe or smoke a pipe," added Gerald Fitzgerald, with a humorous smile.

"Exactly. Now, you know *you* are not that sort of a fellow. For when she called *you* a mercenary traitor and bade you to leave her forever, you rushed from her presence in a towering passion, and went off and married another woman! Whereas if she should call the elephantine German a mercenary traitor, he would not mind it any more than if she had called him a Mersey potato!"

Colonel Fitzgerald made no reply. They had turned in their walk, and were now approaching the house.

As they drew near, the door opened and a party of men issued from it. Among them was the coroner and jury.

"Your inquest is over, then?" said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Yes, yes," said Coroner Pickard.

"And the verdict?"

"Here is a copy of it."

And Dr. Pickard placed a folded paper in Colonel Fitzgerald's hands. The latter opened the paper and glanced over the preliminary formula, until he came to the verdict:

> "Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, late of the Summit Manor, Wilde county, West Virginia, came to his death through a wound in the lungs, inflicted by a dagger held in the hands of a person unknown to the jury."

"Under the circumstances, the only possible verdict that could be rendered, I suppose."

"The only possible one," answered the coroner and the magistrate in a breath.

"And now, Colonel, our duties here being over, we will bid you good-afternoon," said the coroner.

"Not so, if you please, gentlemen. Pray return to the house, and permit me to offer you some refreshments," insisted Colonel Fitzgerald.

"No, no, thank you, no! You have ladies there. No, you must please excuse us, Colonel, and let us go," said old Squire Rawlins for himself and party.

"The ladies will be pleased to see you, and, in short, I insist on your going in," said Gerald Fitzgerald.

"Oh, yes! Set fire to you, coroner. You are not going to affront a man by turning your back on his house

without breaking bread in it," exclaimed blunt Royal Greenleaf, taking Pickard by the shoulders with kindly roughness, and facing him around the way he should go.

The party laughed and yielded the point, not unwilling to be compelled to do as they liked. Colonel Fitzgerald conducted them to the parlour, where, by his previous orders, luncheon had been prepared for them. The men gathered around the table and ate and drank until they were satisfied, but all without jest or merriment; and in a grave, funereal manner, befitting the occasion. Jubal, going in and out between the dining-room and the kitchen, waited on the table.

Old Jess toasted bread and cheese, and grumbled.

"All de many an' long years as me and Marse Gab'el Haddon an' Miss Gertrude lib here, we lib quiet an' decent an' 'spectable; but here soon's ebber Marse Ger'ld come ebbery fing turned topsy-turvy, with battles and murders and sudden deaths. But what de ole sayin' say? 'New measures, new men!' 'Sides which, young men *is* de debil, even de bes' ob dem, as Marse Ger'ld is de bes' ob dem, dat's certain. Now, all dis day long, people a comin' an' comin'. Here for years an' years nobody ebber come near de place 'cept 'twas to cross de ferry! An' now dese las' free days, since Marse Colonel come home, nuffin' but comin' an' comin' more an' more; eatin' an' drinkin' all de time, turnin' a nice quiet house inter a noisy, bois'terous stage-coach tavern. 'It can't pour but it rains,' as de ole sayin' say. Heap o' sense in dem ole sayin's; an' de longer I lib de more I find it so! Dey want more toas' cheese, you say, Jubal? Well, den, you come an' take de fork an' toas' it yourse'f. I ain't been use to bein' of a cook to a road-side public, an' so I tell yer all good, dere!" concluded old Jess, as she handed the toasting-fork to Jubal and dropped herself into her chair.

But the vexed old woman was soon relieved of unwelcome guests, for that plate of toasted cheese was the last edible consumed by the coroner's jury, who soon after took leave and went away. Meanwhile, the undertaker and his men had been at work, and the remains of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald were properly laid out in the room in which he had passed away.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LITTLE LADY OF THE MANOR.

So, she strove against her weakness,
Though at times, her spirit sank;
Shaped herself with woman's meekness,
To all duties of her rank.

TENNYSON.

WHEN the house was once more clear of all official outsiders, and restored to something like its normal state of peace and order, Gerald Fitzgerald went softly up to his wife's chamber to see if she were awake, and to apprise her of the presence of lady guests in the house. He silently entered the room, and saw Gertrude dimly, as she lay upon the bed, and believing her to be asleep, hesitated to disturb her, until she herself spoke, saying:—"Is that you, Gerald?"

"Yes, love; I hope my entrance did not startle you."

"Oh, no; I have been awake some minutes. How long I must have slept! What time is it?"

"Just seven, Gertrude."

"Then I must have slept six hours; and in the daytime, too. Oh, what a Rip Van Winkle I am!"

"After waking three days and three nights! Not an hour too long have you slept, child. How do you feel, Gertrude?"

"Quite restored and refreshed. Quite ready for any duty that may require me."

"I am glad to hear it. That is right. We have guests in the house, my dear. The Greenleafs are here."

"Oh, I shall be so pleased to see them."

"And Mr. Ben Bowers."

"Poor, homeless old man! he is welcome. He shall always be welcome to come as often and stay as long as he pleases when we go to the Summit—shall he not, Gerald?"

"Yes, love, always—he or any other creature whom you may wish to befriend."

"Any one else here, Gerald?"

"Dr. Goodwin."

"Dear Dr. Goodwin, who joined our hands!"

"And Miss Maxima Rowley."

"Oh, Miss Maxima Rowley!" cried Gertrude, with an involuntary shudder.

"Do not fear her, love. The dragon's teeth are drawn, and her claws are clipped. Be good to her, Gertrude. You are her feudal lady."

"What do you mean, Gerald?"

"She is living a tenant at will in your manor-house of Hill Top Hall. You can send her forth a homeless pauper, whenever you please."

"Oh, Gerald, never, never would we disturb her in her home!"

"I have promised so much, in your name, love—that is, to give her a life interest in the manor—it cannot be for many years."

"But, oh, dear Gerald, all this seems strange and wrong!"

"What does, little lady of the manor?"

"Oh, that I should have a manor of my own—I, who never desired to have anything that I did not get from you—my sovereign!" she said, lifting her eyes to his face.

"'The meek shall inherit the earth.' You are the mistress not of one manor only, but of several. Some of the haughtiest heads will be bent, when you shall get your rights, my little love. And you will get them at once and without contest. Your rights are clear as day, and no one will be fool enough to contend them. Yes, my little dove-eyed darling, you are at this moment the wealthiest landowner on the continent." Gertrude gazed at him in mute amazement for a moment, and then, in a low tone, inquired: "Are you glad, Gerald?"

"I am very, very glad, my darling! because it all comes to *you*, my little, meek and gentle love."

"Then I am glad, too, for your sake. Now, must I

not get ready and go down to make our lady-visitors comfortable?"

"Yes, dear; for our worthy old Jess, who has reigned here for so many years, feels herself personally aggrieved by the inroad of so many people."

"Poor Jess, I will soon pacify her; she is as easily mollified as any child!" said Gertrude, softly.

She arose and dressed neatly, and went down into the parlour, where she met only Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald, and Miss Maxima Rowley. Mrs. Doy came forward immediately and folded Gertrude to her bosom in a warm embrace.

Miss Maxima Rowley stood aloof, until Gertrude, mindful of Gerald's counsel, to be good to the old lady, went up to her and held out her hand, saying:

"How do you do, Miss Maxima? I hope I find you quite well. Will you not take the arm-chair and sit nearer the fire? There is quite a draft from that window near you."

"Thank you, madam, I am very well where I am," answered Miss Maxima, stiffly.

"*Pearls before swine!*" muttered old Jess, who, having cleared away the jury lunch, was now setting the table for supper.

"Colonel Fitzgerald told me that Dr. Goodwin and Mr. Greenleaf and Mr. Bowers were here," said Gertrude, as she took a seat near Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald.

"They have gone out together for a stroll by the river. They will be back in time for tea. But now, my dear, let me beg of you never again to call me, or my sister, or brother, Mrs. or Miss or Mr. Call us Cousin Roy, Cousin Sue, and Cousin Doy. Your father's mother, and our mother's father, were own brother and sister, and so you see we are second cousins." And here Mrs. Doy entered into a full explanation of all the marriages and inter-marriages, which had brought about this relationship.

In the midst of the talk the gentlemen returned.

The meeting between Gertrude and her venerable friend, Dr. Goodwin, was very affectionate and cordial.

"I owe so much to you, dear Dr. Goodwin," said the little lady. "So much to your long and patient investigation into the fate of Gabriel Haddon's missing daughter."

"Yes, my love; but little did I think at the time that Gabriel Haddon's lost daughter was the wife of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, and that they were your parents, and that you were really in fact what you had always been in adoption, the granddaughter of Gabriel Haddon," replied the good rector.

"We can never repay the great debt that we owe you, Dr. Goodwin, for your two years of patient labour in that cause."

"My child, if ever there was a labour of love, my search for Gabriel Haddon's lost child was one. And if ever there was a happy man on earth, I am that man, because of that success. Gabriel Haddon was the dearest friend I ever had in this life. There now! There is Royal Greenleaf and Mr. Bowers waiting modestly, at a distance, to pay their respects to you—you intense, concentrated and absorbed little being, who can never see more than one person or think of more than one thing at a time; go, meet them."

Gertrude turned gracefully to greet the two gentlemen, who had held back during her short colloquy with Dr. Goodwin.

"Well, upon my sacred word and honour!" exclaimed Royal Greenleaf, with good-humoured raillery, as he seized and held both her hands and looked her in the face with his merry blue eyes. "What do you think of yourself, madam, for creating all this disturbance in a quite country place? Here you have left us for more than twelve months to believe you dead and gone to glory, as the darkies say, and now you come back unexpectedly, to make a noise and dispossess half Wilde county! I ask you what you mean by it?"

"Please, Mr. Policeman, it wasn't I!" said Gertrude, answering him in the same spirit, and shaking her curly brown-head demurely. "I didn't know anything about it!"

"Oh!" said Royal, stooping and whispering, "then I know who it was! It was that hoary-headed old sinner they call the Rector of Red Sandstone Parish."

"Yes," assented Gertrude, nodding her head confidentially, "*it was he.*"

"I'll arrest him on the spot, and summon you for a witness against him," said Royal.

"Greenleaf, I wish you would stand aside and give a fellow a chance. It seems as hard to get speech of this fair lady as if she were a queen fenced in by courtiers. How do you do, Mrs. Fitzgerald?" said Mr. Benjamin Bowers, pushing forward.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Bowers," said Gertrude, extending her hand.

"Cousin Bowers, you should say. We are cousins by your marriage with Gerald, you know. His mother's grandfather, and my grandfather's mother were own sister and brother—"

And here Mr. Bowers would have gone into a deep analysis of the kinship had not supper been just then announced.

Gertrude presided at the table with perfect ease and grace, for she possesed that very first essential of good manners—self-forgetfulness. After supper Dr. Goodwin took leave, and rode home in the starlight. The remainder of the company, being all near relatives of the deceased, stayed over to the funeral, which took place on the following Sunday.

The news of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald's sudden return, and tragic death, had flown all over Wilde county, creating such a great excitement as could only have been raised in a quiet country neighbourhood, where sensations are unusual. An account of it had been published in the Saturday's issue of *The Wilde County Agricultural Chronicle and Commercial Advertiser*. And such was the demand for the little sheet that a large extra edition had to be thrown off, using up nearly all the proprietor's stock of blank printing paper, and obliging him to send a hasty order to Baltimore for a fresh supply.

But one item did not transpire—the identity of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald and Adam Lackland. That secret was in the possession of but few persons, who, from motives of prudence, determined to keep it.

On Sunday, the morning of the funeral, a vast concourse of people assembled at Haddon's Ferry, most of whom came from motives of curiosity to view the face of a man who had been so long lost, and who had had such a mysterious and romantic career; and many among the elder of whom recognized him, even in his coffin, as the long missing heir of Summit Manor.

The deceased man's forefathers, the Fitzgeralds of the Summit, had founded the beautiful little chapel of St. Patricks, and had richly endowed it. They had their family vault under the chancel. And their the mortal parts of all the Fitzgeralds for half a dozen generations back, had been laid.

To this ancestral chapel the remains of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, the most unhappy man of his family, was conveyed, followed by a long procession of carriages, filled with relatives, friends, neighbours, and careless or curious sight-seers.

The last solemn rites were celebrated at the church, while the coffin lay before the altar, and then the body was deposited in the altar under the chancel, where it lay between those of his unrelenting father and his broken-hearted mother.

After the funeral the vast concourse of people who had formed the procession to the church quietly dispersed and returned to their homes.

The friends and relatives, who had been for several days the guests of the ferry, took an affectionate leave of Colonel and Mrs. Fitzgerald just outside the church-yard gate.

Gerald and Gertrude drove back alone to Haddon's Ferry to spend one quiet night before going on to their own magnificent home—the Summit Manor House.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE SUMMIT.

Now has descended a serener hour,
And with reviving fortune friends return,
While suffering gives thee knowledge and the power
To say let scorn be not repaid with scorn.

SHELLEY.

THE next morning the sun rose clear and bright, with a cool and invigorating air.

It was the fourteenth of February—St. Valentine's Day—a most auspicious day for the home-going of the wedded pair. Gerald and Gertrude arose early to prepare for their drive.

Old Hannibal and Jubal harnessed the horses to the carriage, and brought it around to the front, and put into it such parcels as Meta brought from the house for her mistress's use. Aunt Jess cooked the breakfast worthy of Soyer, and had it ready to serve hot the moment her master and mistress should make their appearance.

Gertrude was the first to come down, and, with her old simple habit, she went to the kitchen to have a last talk with Jess.

She found the old woman seated in a low chair before the fire, engaged in watching the breakfast, and with her old hymn-book open on her lap, crooning a camp-meeting hymn that was not to be found between its covers—

"There will be no more sighing,
There will be no more dying
Over there!
There will be no more smarting,
There will be no more parting
Over there!"

Seeing Gertrude, she exclaimed:

"Hi', honey! you up and dressed and down a'ready? And me here almost smotherin' ob myse'f, a singing underneaf of my breath, for fear ob 'sturbin' you."

"Yes, Aunt Jess; there, don't get up. I will sit down here," said Gertrude, drawing a chair to the fire and seating herself. "I have come down Jess, with Colonel Fitzgerald's full approval, to say to you, that it rests with yourself to remain here at the ferry, or to go with us to the Summit. We want you to do as you think best for your happiness."

"Thanky', honey! It do seem hard after havin' of you 'stored to me from de sea, to hab you go away fo' good and all, and not go 'long wid you," whimpered Jess.

"Then come along with me, dear Jess! I shall be so happy to have you," said Gertrude, laying her hand tenderly on the old woman's gay plaid turban.

"No, honey, I can't do it, chile. I can't go 'long o' you."

"Why not, Jess?"

"Law, honey, I staid here so long, I done tuk root! You can't move ole trees 'out killing of 'em, honey! What de ole sayin' say? What *do* de ole sayin' say 'bout dat, anyway? I 'most forget what it *do* say! Law, I must be goin' into my dotage, to forget de wisdom ob de forefathers dis way. Anyhow, I know de ole sayin' says somethin' mons'ous sensible about dat. 'Cause dere's a heap o' sense in dese ole sayin's, ef a body'd on'y 'tend to 'em. De long an' short of it is, honey, dough I love you, as de apple of my eye, I am too ole to be uprooted and transported. 'Sides which, here's poor ole John Brooks, what would ever he do widout me, after livin' togedder all dese years like brudder and sister? People used to ax me, why I didn't marry John Brooks. I say, *who—me?* No, I thank 'em, I had too much 'spect for my ole man gone to Jordan's happy land, and waitin' for me dere. I say one husband is 'nuff for one 'oman, and a heap too much too, when dey drinks and loafs. No, I wouldn't marry John Brooks; but no more would I leabe him."

"But, Jess, we could take John Brooks with us, for that matter."

"And den who gwine take care ob de ferry? 'Sides

which, honey, I tell you ag'in I'm too ole a tree to be pull up by de roots and put some 'ers else!"

"But, Jess, suppose the railroad they are talking about should come along here, the old ferry-house itself might have to come down."

"*Rale*road, *rale*road!" sniffed Jess, with a look of disgust. "Now, chile, no 'fence to *you*, but it do make me feel sick to hear 'em talk about de *rale*road, jes' as if dere never was a *rale*road here before; but all our good country roads and turnpikes wasn't *rale*roads; but *make-believe* roads. Our roads was allers rale nuff for us, and our forebyes before us. I wonder what dey mean anyway by *rale*roads?"

Gertrude had no time to enter into any explanation of the nature and purpose of railroads, for just then Colonel Fitzgerald's step was heard on the stairs, and Jess started up to take the breakfast to the table. Fifteen minutes later, Gerald and Gertrude sat down to an epicurean meal—fine coffee, light rolls, Wilde River trout, Spring chickens, broiled ham, new-laid eggs, and so forth. Having recovered from the effects of fatigue and excitement, both, to Jessie's great delight, made a very good breakfast. After which they took leave of Jess and John Brooks, and entered the capacious travelling-carriage that was to convey them to the Summit Manor.

"Won't you nebber come here to stop no more—nebber no more?" exclaimed old Jess, standing in the door and weeping, with her apron to her eyes.

"Oh, yes, Jess, we will come back before the fishing season is over, and spend a week to enjoy the fine trout. And every year, during the fishing season, we will come down for a few weeks," said Colonel Fitzgerald, kindly.

"Well, once a year is better'n nuffin. 'Half a loaf is better'n a whole one,' as de ole sayin' says; 'mazin' 'mount o' sense in dese old sayin's," sobbed Jess behind her apron.

"Besides, dear Jess, we shall have to come to the ferry every time we go to Wildeville or go to visit any of our friends on the other side of the river. And then, Jess, you must come up often to the Summit to see us," added Gertrude, affectionately.

"Oh, yes, honey, you may 'pend upon it, I will do dat."

The carriage started, and Gertrude waved her hand to

her old nurse, who rushed back into the house, sobbing aloud. Gerald and Gertrude occupied the capacious carriage alone together, and the old coachman drove them.

Meta followed in a waggon, in charge of Gertrude's sea-trunk and Gerald's valises, and driven by Jubal. Their way ran along the banks of Wilde River for several miles, and then entered upon the steep and narrow and tortuous road that led through Wilde Cat Woods and up to the magnificent elevated plateau overhanging the river, and upon which the Summit Manor house stood.

It was nigh noon when the carriage entered the gates, rolled around the circular drive, and drew up before the river front. Gerald alighted first, and opened the carriage-door, and received Gertrude in his arms, saying as he kissed her:

"Welcome home, dear wife, dearest love! welcome to the home that you will brighten all the days of your life!"

"My life shall thank you, Gerald!" she whispered, as the tears of mingled joy and grief filled her eyes.

He led her into the hall, where the housekeeper and principal servants were waiting to receive them.

"Are your mistress's rooms ready for her?" demanded Colonel Fitzgerald of the old housekeeper.

"Yes, Marse Gerald, sur'! All ready! The fires lighted since early dis mornin', and all neat as a rose and warm as a toas'. Will I show de young mist'ess up now?" inquired Hetty, with a courtesy.

"No," the master answered gently. Then turning to Gertrude he whispered:

"Come, dearest, no one but myself shall put you in possession of your nest."

And he drew her arm within his, and led her up stairs to a spacious suite of rooms on the right hand of the central hall, running from front to back, and comprising bed-chamber, dressing-room, and boudoir, all upholstered in rosewood and rose-coloured satin and lace. Gertrude uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight, and then turned suddenly and thanked him with a child's thanks—a warm kiss and a caress.

'So you like your nest, little bird?" he inquired.

"Oh, I have never seen anything so pretty in any house," she exclaimed.

"Except when you have looked into a mirror, little lady! But come! I will leave you to get acquainted with your rooms, and to see if you cannot discover some fault in them. I am going down to see Oxton—my land steward, you know, who is waiting to consult me. I will send up that small warehouse you call your sea-trunk," he added, smiling, as he left the room.

Gertrude walked through her beautiful rose-coloured rooms to look at them more at her leisure. The front room was the boudoir, and its three lofty front windows overlooked the wooded descent of the mountain to the river shore, the river, and the Eagle Roost Ridge beyond. The middle room was the dressing-room, filled up with wardrobes, bureaus, mirrors, dressing-tables, a bath closet, and every comfort and luxury of the toilet.

The back room was the bed-chamber, where three lofty back windows overlooked a beautiful, undulating, well-wooded, and well-watered country, whose aspect was always a refreshment to the eyes. Each of these three rooms had doors opening into each other, and other doors leading out into the hall. Each had an open fire-place, lighted up now by a bright little fire. The middle, or dressing-room, had, on each side of its fireplace, side-windows that looked down on the gardens of the manor. Gertrude had scarcely made these observations when Meta entered the boudoir, followed by two men bearing the great sea-trunk. Gertrude directed the girl to have it placed in the dressing-room until it could be unpacked, and its contents transferred to wardrobes and bureaus.

"The housekeeper wants me to say that lunch is ready, ma'am, whenever you are ready for it," said Meta, when she had obeyed her mistress and dismissed the men.

"Is Colonel Fitzgerald ready?" inquired Gertrude.

"I don't know, ma'am. He is talking to Mr. Oxton in the study."

"Very well; then lunch must wait until he gets through."

Gertrude then changed her black bombazine travelling dress for a rich, black, lustreless silk, deeply trimmed with crape, and with little ruff and cuffs of white crepe lisse.

Then leaving Meta to unpack her wardrobe, she went down to the drawing-room with the intention of waiting

there for Colonel Fitzgerald. But he met her at the foot of the stairs, and took her into the dining-room, where lunch was waiting. Afterwards they spent the afternoon in going through the house, Gerald showing her all the improvements that had already been made, and asking her counsel as to others that were in contemplation.

"We have five manors, my darling, and in time we must, as a matter of duty, as well as of health and pleasure, spend a portion of each year at each place. But this, our old ancestral hall, should be our home of homes. We should restore and embellish every portion of the house, and gather into it all that can make it most attractive to a refined, intellectual, and æsthetic taste," he explained, as they went along.

"Five manors, Gerald," she repeated, gravely, "five manors where we want but one home. It seems unjust, Gerald, and I hear with pain that some wealthy people will be impoverished, and some aged people be made homeless by my legal claim upon their estates. Let not this be, Gerald. Let the aged remain in their homes for the term of their natural lives, and let young children, where there are such, not be brought to want that we may be enriched," she added with tears in the soft brown eyes.

"My good little Gertrude, listen to me. These estates came to us from our ancestors, and should be transmitted to our descendants. We have no right to break the line of succession by alienating one manor, even for the sake of the aged or the children. But rest easy, little woman. No one can be very much hurt by the restitution of your rights. For instance, though you are the heiress of Summit Manor, no one is to be turned out here," he added, with a singular smile.

"Oh, no!" she said, shaking her head at him.

"And although you are the heiress of Hill Top Hall, you have agreed to let Miss Maxima Rowley have her life interest in that?"

"Ah, yes! We would not disturb her, would we, Gerald?"

"No, but we must be very careful, in conferring that simple life interest, which secures her independence for the few years she may survive. Next there is Cave Court, now in the nominal possession of old Samuel

Rowley—a bachelor of eighty. I think we can afford to let him live his life out in peace."

"Yes, yes, Gerald!"

"Then, there is the Mountain Manor—"

"Your Cousin Geraldine's inheritance, but for my coming! Oh, Gerald! let us not disturb her either!"

"There will be no need to do so. She has disturbed herself! She has shaken the dust of Wilde county off her feet, and has gone to Washington to marry a German prince with an unpronounceable name."

"Oh, I am so glad! so she will be happy."

"There are four manors provided for. The fifth is in Maryland, a stony, lonesome island, near the mouth of the Potomac. Now I don't know who is the nominal proprietor of that estate. It is the least valuable of all. But whoever married Rebecca Fleming, is the nominal master."

"Oh, Gerald!" suddenly exclaimed Gertrude, clasping her hands.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Oh! what a strange and dreadful thing."

"What is, my dear child? Why are you so excited?" demanded Fitzgerald, in astonishment.

"Oh, Gerald! do you not know then who married Rebecca Fleming?"

"No, Gertrude! How on earth should I know?"

"I thought I might have told you. It was Captain Wailes, *our* own dear Captain Wailes, who married Rebecca Fleming! And we must never, *never*, NEVER, NEVER disturb him in his possession!" cried Gertrude, in great agitation.

"Is that so, my little lady? Then indeed we must give up Stony Island! The man who saved your life must not be impoverished by the simple fact of your existence."

"Oh, no, no, dear Gerald! that would indeed be to return evil for good."

"I must warn our attorney to take no measure in that direction, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Gerald! Oh, please act quickly."

"I will go to Wildeville and see about it to-morrow. That will be time enough. Come, dear, it is growing dark. We will return to the drawing-room now before

you get thoroughly chilled. These shut-up rooms are damp and musty. Come down to the fire and light and to—dinner," added Gerald, as he drew her arm within his own, and took her downstairs. After dinner they spent the evening in the drawing-room.

For a while they talked of the inexhaustible subject, their sudden and tragic parting on that awful night of the fire at sea, and of the many accidents that had happened to each, during the trying year of separation. Afterwards Gerald arose, and inviting her to follow him, took her to the back division of the drawing-room, in which stood the grand piano.

"I want you to try this instrument, Gertrude," he said, as he opened it and drew the stool to its place.

"I have not practised, or had the opportunity to practise, since we left Europe, except on one evening during the week of my stay with the Flemings at San Francisco. I am afraid that my hand has 'forgot its cunning,'" said Gertrude, as she took her seat and ran her fingers over the keys.

"Those nimble fingers have not lost their skill; but what do you think of the instrument?" he inquired.

"It seems to be simply perfect," she answered.

"Here is some standard old music and excellent new. Make your own selection," he said, as he laid a pile of loose sheets before her.

She looked over them, and finally selected the evening hymn of Mozart, which she sang and played with exquisite sweetness and fervour. Selections from Haydn and Handel followed. And then Gerald gently removed the music, saying:

"I will not task you farther to-night, love. We have proved that the instrument is a good one, and that your hand has not lost its cunning, nor your voice its freshness and melody." She arose with a smile, and he closed the piano.

So passed their first calmly, happy day at home.

Had Gertrude forgotten her father, then?

No, indeed. Brief as her acquaintance had been with him, she thought of him with the most tender affection, not as "dead and gone," to use the common phrase, but (being purified in the fiery trials of his earthly life) as

passed into a higher state of being, as living happy, and often, though unseen, present with her.

With her home, and its sublime scenery without, and its comforts, elegancies, and luxuries within, she was as much delighted as a child would have been with such a change from the plainness, almost rudeness, of her former dwelling-place. And with her husband she seemed in heaven.

Only one "still voice" in her soul warned her that even joy must be tempered, or on this earth it would not last.

Within the next few days our little lady of the manor received many calls.

Wedding calls, indeed, were not in order, since the husband and wife had been married more than two years; nor were visits of congratulation upon their reunion, for since that happy event they had suffered a bereavement; but visits of condolence from friends and kinsfolks were exactly right, and these poured in upon the pair; for all Wilde county was more or less akin to them, and all wished to establish visiting relations with the wealthiest house in the county.

Gertrude received all comers with the quiet courtesy peculiarly her own, and by her manner charmed and won all hearts. Her social position seemed now assured—secured.

Yet a deadly enemy, with diabolical malice and cunning, was secretly trying to undermine and destroy it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STING IN THE DARK.

'Tis slander,
Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue
Out-venoms all the worms of the Nile; whose breath
Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
All corners of the world! Kings, queens, and States,
Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave,
This viperous slander enters.

SHAKESPEARE.

OUR happy, re-united pair had been at home about a week, when one morning, while they were seated at breakfast the mail-bag was brought in by Jubal and delivered to his master.

"You are very early in your return this morning. It is not yet ten o'clock," said Colonel Fitzgerald, with a smile, as he opened the bag and began to take out letters and papers.

"I was airly, sir; I started for Wildeville 'fore day-break," Jubal explained, as he took the bag and left the room.

"Here is a letter for you, love, post-marked Charlotte Hall, Md.," said Gerald, as he tossed a white envelope, with an old-fashioned red seal, into Gertrude's lap.

"Oh, it is from Captain Wailes!" she gladly exclaimed, as she seized it and opened it, and began to devour its contents.

"See here, I shall grow jealous of that old sea king presently," said Colonel Fitzgerald, shaking his head at her with assumed gravity.

"Oh, no, you won't, Gerald. You can never, never be

jealous of any one," she replied, laughing, looking up from her letter.

"Why not, pray?" demanded her husband.

"Because you know me too well."

"You are right, little love. I did but jest—a very sorry jest. Nothing on earth could make me jealous of you. Return to your letter and I will look after mine," he said, as he proceeded to take up and open the first at hand.

Gertrude recommenced reading.

Captain Wailes' letter was a homely, fatherly affair, commencing, "My dear child," and describing his safe arrival at home; his joy and gratitude at finding his two dear Rebeccas, his wife and daughter, well and hearty; and finally, his great anxiety to hear how his dear little passenger had fared on her journey home, whether she had found her husband in good health, and whether she herself continued well.

Gertrude pressed the letter to her lips and to her heart, and then eagerly held it out to her husband, saying:

"Read it, Gerald. Read it, please."

But for the first time in their married life, Gerald Fitzgerald was deaf to Gertrude's voice. She looked at him in surprise, that soon became alarm. He was painfully absorbed in the perusal of an open letter that he held in his hand. His face was livid; his lips bitterly compressed; his brows gathered into the darkest frown she had ever seen him wear; and his eyes sternly rivetted upon the lines he was reading.

"Gerald! Oh, what is the matter?" she inquired, going to his side. Instantly he started, clutched the letter in his grasp, and dropped his hand to his side.

The sudden gesture seemed to express terror lest her eye should have caught one word of its meaning.

"Oh, Gerald, what is the matter? Any bad news?" inquired Gertrude again, distress in every cadence of her voice.

"No, Gertrude; no bad news at all—only annoyance," he answered, in a gentle tone, though still with frowning brows, and lips quickly compressed again.

"May I know what it is, Gerald?" she meekly asked him.

"No, child, no. It is nothing that you should know anything about, or have anything to do with," replied Fitzgerald.

"But it has distressed you, Gerald!"

"No; it has only enraged me. I am sorry that this has disturbed *you*, Gertrude. Compose yourself, little girl, and look over these letters and papers for a while," he said, as he drew her to his bosom, kissed her with even more than usual tenderness, and then abruptly left the room, taking the mysterious letter with him.

She followed him with her eyes until he had closed the door behind him, and then sank down in her chair, sighing:

"Oh, what is it that moves Gerald so deeply? He is not easily disturbed; but this letter has shaken him more than I have ever seen him shaken since our marriage. Oh, what can it mean? What is he keeping from me? There were to have been no secrets between us. I have none from him. He might search my life, and search my spirit, through and through, and find nothing that I had hidden from him!

"Why does he keep this from me? If it troubles him, why should it not trouble me also? But stay—I will not ask myself these questions. If my husband keeps a secret from me, it is wise and right that he should do it; for Gerald would not, and could not, do anything wrong or foolish. I know that! Yet, since it is something that disturbs him so, I cannot feel easy about it!"

She sat for a long time brooding over the subject before she could rouse herself to answer Captain Wailes' letter.

In writing to that good old sailor, she discreetly refrained from mentioning the wedding that had been interrupted by her arrival, or the tragedy that had so closely followed it, or the discoveries that had recently proved herself to be the wealthiest heiress in Wilde county.

But she described her journey with Sallust Rowley from Washington to Blackville, when they parted company, Sallust continuing on to Wildeville, and she herself changing coaches at Wendover. She spoke of her disappointment at not finding Colonel Fitzgerald at his

quarters, and of her solitary journey through the forest from Wendover to Haddon's Ferry, where she had the happiness to find her old servants alive and well, though greatly startled by her reappearance. Then leaving an important but imperceptible gap in her narrative, she briefly stated that on the next morning she had rejoined her husband, who had received her with joy as one raised from death to life; with all the joy, indeed, that she had anticipated.

She told him that their happiness was soon tempered by sorrow for the loss of her father, who had passed away a few days after her arrival at home. She added that they were then at home, at the Summit, living very quietly on account of their recent bereavement, but where they would be very grateful to receive a visit from Captain Wailes and his wife and daughter, and to express to the captain their sense of the deep obligation they were under to him.

Gertrude finished her letter and left it open beside that of her correspondent for Colonel Fitzgerald to read.

Meanwhile Gerald had retired to his study, locked the door, seated himself at his writing table and straightened out his crumpled and mysterious epistle.

With his elbows resting on the table, and his head between his hands, he stared at the lines lying before him.

"The serpent," he muttered to himself. "This vile, venomous serpent, to creep into the sanctuary of domestic peace and honour, to sting both to death in the dark! But that cannot be! The woman's heel shall bruise the head of the serpent. Yes, she shall trample it to death in the dark, not knowing what she does; deeming only that she treads on flowers all the time! She shall never know, my sinless child shall never know, the charge this cowardly assassin of fair reputation dares to bring against her! I grieve that she even saw the letter. She shall never see its contents. Yet I must not destroy this precious document, either! I must preserve it to bring it up against the writer, if ever I should discover him, or her! For this strangely cramped and evidently disguised chirography gives me no clue to the sex of the slanderer. I wonder if I know the author, or can detect the handwriting?"

And with this, Fitzgerald scrutinized the writing before him with more than former attention.

The letter was calculated to rouse the indignation of a calmer man than Gerald Fitzgerald. It ran as follows:

"WILDEVILLE, Feb. 19, 18—.

"COLONEL FITZGERALD: Your present correspondent desires to congratulate you on your pre-eminence as being the most complacent of men, and the most Christian of gentlemen!

"Your complacency is wonderfully illustrated in your taking back the frail creature who has been playing truant for twelve months in the company of her former lover! This is most commendable on your part!—doing the greatest 'honour to your heart and head!'

"And your Christianity shines bright as the noonday sun in your act.

"Humility is one of the loveliest of Christian virtues. You have proved your claim to it by having passed by the high-born ladies of the land for a low-born ferry-girl, whose ignorant and depraved nature led her to deceive you before marriage, and betray you afterwards.

"Forgiveness of injuries is a Christian duty. You set a bright and shining example in the practice of that duty, by taking back to your heart and home the sinful woman who forsook you more than a year ago to become the travelling companion of Sallust Rowley, her lover, with whom she had been on terms of the closest intimacy before she ever saw your face!

"Yes, Colonel Gerald Fitzgerald, Gertrude Haddon was the sweetheart of this Sallust Rowley long before you ever heard of her. She was in the habit of receiving him at the ferry without the knowledge of her grandfather. Notably, on one night—the night of old General Slaughter's death—she took advantage of the absence of her grandfather and the old housekeeper, and she received him at the ferry, and passed the night alone with him there. She sent him off early in the morning before the old people's return.

"If you doubt this fact put the question to the young woman herself, and then see if she dares to deny it.

"Of course young Rowley never thought of marrying her; none but a Christian gentleman and complacent man like yourself would dream of doing such a thing as that.

"But no doubt they must have kept up a running correspondence even after the girl's marriage to you, judging by what followed: for they met as by appointment on board the *Messenger*, and when that luckless ship was lost by fire they contrived in some way to be rescued together. They passed as man and wife at the fisherman's cottage where they remained for some time.

"If you doubt this fact write to Jane Reynolds, St. Margaret's Bay, near Dover, England, and ask her if the young couple rescued by her husband were not supposed, by their own words and manner, to be a bridegroom and bride on their wedding tour.

"Then instead of rejoining *you* as soon as possible, what did they do but start upon a twelve months' voyage around the world and then come back to their native country—but part immediately

on entering it—the lover, weary of his companion, going to his own home—the girl, forsaken by her lover, returning to hers, where you, most complacent of men, most Christian of gentlemen, receive her with open arms.

"Oh, bright and shining light, we tender you our homage!

"But do not be disappointed if other men and women, when they hear the circumstances, as they must hear them, not being able to understand or appreciate the magnanimity of your conduct, should fail to recognize you or your wife, and turn aside when they see you coming. And should you feel humiliated, remember that you have the highest admiration and homage of—

"ONE SINCERE FRIEND."

Now, this diabolical letter was certainly one calculated to drive any ordinary man to insanity and crime. But Gerald Fitzgerald was not an ordinary individual. He was a man of very strong passions, indeed, but of a still stronger will to control them. This anonymous assassin had roused his whole soul to war, yet he was able to control and direct his emotions. He sat with his eyes riveted upon the letter, and his mind bent upon one purpose to discover and punish the slanderer. He had but one clue to the culprit, who must have been one who hated Gertrude, and who had, besides, some knowledge of the events that followed her shipwreck, when, in company with Sallust Rowley, she had been sheltered in the fisherman's hut. Now no one could have known of these events but from one of the parties concerned.

Gertrude, he felt sure, had spoken of her disasters to none but himself. Therefore, it must have been honest, open-hearted, and open-mouthed Sallust Rowley, who had been blatant on the subject of Jane Reynold's funny mistake which was here so fiendishly misrepresented. Now to whom had innocent Sallust Rowley talked? To some one, who, unknown to him, hated Gertrude, and sought to destroy her! Who answered this description in all its particulars? *Geraldine Fitzgerald!*

Yes, there could be no doubt of this in Gerald's mind! Geraldine hated Gertrude, and would have liked to ruin her. Geraldine had, of course, heard Sallust Rowley's account of their shipwreck and rescue, and shelter in the fisherman's cottage, and wishing to destroy Gertrude by rousing the demon of jealousy in her husband's mind, had written and misrepresented all these events, and added to them devilish inventions and inferences of her own!

But this foul letter had not, as we have seen, raised a single doubt of his Gertrude in Gerald's loyal mind. He had spoken the truth when he said it was utterly impossible for him to be jealous of Gertrude. He knew her too well, trusted her too utterly. That was, perhaps what he meant when he said that she should trample the serpent to death, deeming only that she trod among flowers. In other words, her daily life of purity, which he would make as happy as it was blameless, should annihilate calumny. Having satisfied himself as to its author. Gerald Fitzgerald took the letter and locked it up in his table-drawer. He had scarcely withdrawn the key when the door was opened, and Royal Greenleaf unceremoniously entered the room.

"Ah, Roy! I am very glad to see you! How are you?" exclaimed Colonel Fitzgerald, rising.

"Oh, I am as well as I can be, under the circumstances, Gerald; but I tell you this is enough to knock any man up!" exclaimed Mr. Greenleaf, drawing his handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his flushed face, as he sank into his chair.

"What has happened, my dear Royal? Nothing very serious, I hope?" anxiously inquired Fitzgerald.

"I don't know what you would call serious, Gerald; but this is what has happened. I took this letter out of the Wildeville post-office this morning. As soon as I had read it I did not stop to go home, but I came straight on here to lay it before you, because it concerns you, and your wife most of all. For, let me add, Gerald, that just such letters as this have been scattered far and wide among our friends, all over the country—like poisoned meat in the dog-days. Read this, and tell me what you think of it," said Mr. Greenleaf, as he drew a letter from his pocket and placed it in the hands of his kinsman.

Gerald Fitzgerald frowned as he received the letter, with a direct prevision of the truth that it was an anonymous missive similar to the one he had just locked in his drawer. His first glance confirmed his suspicion; it was in the same handwriting with the one he had received.

He opened it and read it, and found it to be the same in substance as the one he had received—in fact, it was

the very same, modified only in the form of its address to suit the friend and kinsman instead of the husband. It congratulated Mr. Greenleaf of Greenwood on the possession of so magnanimous a friend and relative as Colonel Gerald Fitzgerald, who possessed the rare heroic moral courage to condone such offences in his frail wife as no other man of honour in the world would dare to look over. It then charged Gertrude with having deceived her husband before marriage and afterwards; with having had a too highly favoured lover in her girlhood, and with having forsaken her husband for this lover, with whom she had travelled more than twelve months, and with having only returned to her husband after having been deserted by her lover.

The letter continued, as its type had done, with sarcastic praises of the magnanimity of the husband in receiving the sinful wife with open arms, and ended in ironical encouragement to the kinsman, begging him not to despair, even if in standing by Gerald Fitzgerald and his weak wife he should find himself left alone by all other honourable men and women. Colonel Fitzgerald finished the letter and gravely handed it back to Mr. Greenleaf, who had intently watched him during its perusal, and who now, wiping his flushed face, demanded:

"Gerald! in the name of Heaven, tell me: Is there any, even the very slightest, foundation for this detestable letter?"

"How DARE you ask me such a question, Royal?" fiercely demanded Colonel Fitzgerald, in his turn bending his black eyes like burning stars upon the questioner.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed honest Royal, heaving a great sigh of relief. "Your look answers my question, Gerald, which I beg your pardon and hers for asking. Now, then, there is but one duty before us! You or I have got to shoot or be shot by some diabolical villain. One of us must detect and challenge the writer of that letter, Gerald! For as I said before, such letters as these are scattered all over the country. I have not seen one of them except this addressed to myself, mind you, but I have heard of them vaguely from many quarters. You or I must shoot or be shot by this cowardly secret assassin of a pure woman's reputation."

"The writer of that letter is a woman, and should be a lady, and we cannot proceed against her as against a man," gravely replied Fitzgerald.

"That's a pity," said Royal Greenleaf, after a pause. "But I presume she has some male relative who may be held responsible for her actions, and I'll be blowed to the zenith if we mustn't one of us challenge that male relative," he added, impetuously.

"Then I shall have to call out you, or you me; for we are the nearest of kin to this offending lady," answered Colonel Fitzgerald, with a dry smile.

"Eh! what! You don't mean to say—" began worthy Royal Greenleaf, and then he stopped and stared at his companion, in consternation, pure and simple.

"I mean to say that our cousin Geraldine Fitzgerald has written all these baleful letters!" calmly explained the colonel.

"Whe-ew! Here's a go! For, as I said before, and repeat for the third and last time, these letters are sown like dragons' teeth all over the country, far and wide! I say, what in the deuce is to be done, Gerald?"

"I do not yet know."

"I say, you know! Can't one of us call out her big behemoth of a beau? that German or Roman Prince Sneeze-or-wheeze-my-cough-off, or whatever his name is?"

"I think that would hardly answer our purpose," replied Fitzgerald.

"Then what the dee can we do!"

"We must reflect before we decide on any course."

"Well, good-by; I am going home! When you have done reflecting let me know. As for me, I shall knock down the first man I meet—on general principles."

And with these belligerent words, honest Royal Greenleaf seized his hat and abruptly left the house.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GERALDINE'S REVENGE.

AFTER Royal Greenleaf had left the house, Gerald Fitzgerald remained seated in the library, buried in deep, stern thought.

The fiendish slanders, maliciously invented and secretly circulated to injure the fair fame of his most innocent wife, had now assumed an aspect of importance, not to be ignored.

He was perfectly assured that Geraldine was the secret poisoner of character, who was at work against her. Yet he had no legal evidence of this mental assurance.

Under these circumstances, the difficulty of treating the case was extreme. He could not challenge her as if she were a man; neither was there a single male relative of Geraldine whom he could hold responsible for her conduct. He might indeed proceed to Washington, and demand an interview with her, which she would probably decline; or, if she received him, he might lay that base letter before her eyes and charge her with being its writer, which she would probably deny; in which case he would have no evidence against her. Nevertheless, he had come to the conclusion to pursue this last suggested course, when he was interrupted by another visitor. The door opened and Patricia Fitzgerald entered the library with even more unceremonious haste than her uncle had done before her. She was clothed in a navy-blue riding habit, with a blue cloth cap and black feather. Her face was flushed, her eyes sparkling, her whole expression and manner agitated and indignant.

"Why, Patricia, my dear, how do you do?" exclaimed

Colonel Fitzgerald, shaking off his dark reverie, and rising to meet her. "Your uncle has just left here."

"Has he? I suppose, then, he came direct from the post-office!" answered the girl, throwing herself into the seat her cousin had placed for her.

"You wish to see Gertrude? She is in the morning-room," said Colonel Fitzgerald, standing with his hand on the back of her chair.

"No!" she snapped, planting herself more firmly in her seat, and beginning to tap the carpet nervously with the tip of her boot. "If I had wanted to see Gertrude, I could have asked for her. I wanted to see *you!* Sit down, will you, and don't fidget me by standing there looking over my shoulders."

"Hum! are you often taken in this way, my dear?" dryly inquired Gerald Fitzgerald, as he obediently seated himself.

"Don't ask questions but—LOOK AT THAT!" indignantly exclaimed Patricia, as she laid an open letter on the table before him, and then watched the expression of his face, as he took it up to examine it. It was directed to Miss Patricia Fitzgerald in the now too well-known disguised hand of the previously seen anonymous letters, and its contents were substantially the same as those of the others.

"My dear Patricia," said Gerald Fitzgerald, soothingly, and endeavouring to make light of the matter—"I have already seen two of these weak, malicious letters. They are not worth your attention or mine."

"You take this very coolly, upon my sacred word and honour! Do you really know what this letter charges upon your Gertrude and my Sally? That she was his travelling companion and he was her favoured lover for more than twelve months!" Colonel Fitzgerald winced. It required all his self-control to keep an unmoved countenance.

"OH-H-H!" burst forth Patricia, starting to her feet and walking fiercely up and down the floor—"that any man should dare to write such slanders of your Gertrude and my Sally, and then be suffered to live! To slander Gertrude, the sweetest and most saintly creature that ever lived! and Sallust, a true and loyal gentleman, a stainless

knight as ever served lady in the old chivalrous times. YOU KNOW HE IS!" she suddenly exclaimed, stopping and confronting Fitzgerald with flashing eyes, dilated nostrils, and defiant air.

"I *do* know that Sallust Rowley *is* the true and loyal gentleman you have called him, and that, therefore, he is as invincible to the shafts of slander as is my own most innocent and most honoured wife," earnestly answered Fitzgerald.

"Then why do you sit still there? Why don't you find out the wretch who wrote these vile letters, and cram them down his throat with a red hot poker? My Sally would, if he were here. Oh, yes! I know people may laugh at him because he is little and red-headed, but I tell you that he is a greater soul than all your black-bearded giants put together. I pity the writer of these base letters when my Sally comes back to the neighbourhood and hears about them."

"Has Sallust left the neighbourhood, then?" inquired Fitzgerald, judiciously ignoring the former part of Patricia's speech, because he did not wish to impart to that impetuous being his conviction of Geraldine's authorship of the anonymous letters.

"Yes, he has! He has gone to Washington on some business pending between Uncle Roy and Cousin Gerry, for you know, though Uncle Roy has ceased to be her guardian, he is still her managing agent—though I do suppose she will have nothing to manage after Gertrude has taken possession of the Mountain Manor. But that is not the point! What I wish to know is WHY, in the absence of Sallust, you do not seek out this slanderous wretch and deal with him as he deserves?"

"My dear Patricia, your earnest defence of your friends is very commendable, and now that you drive me to the wall, I am bound to confess that I was occupied with the subject of these letters when you came in; and I am firmly resolved that the man, or even the woman, to whom we can bring home the authorship of these malicious calumnies, shall receive a full measure of justice. Come, now, shall we go to Gertrude?"

"Yes, if you please."

"But let me warn you!—not a word of this calumny

must be permitted to reach and offend the ears of that sinless child!" he added, gravely.

"Whom are you talking to, Gerald? Whom do you take for a fool? Me? Do I look like one? *I* hint a word of these letters to Gertrude? Not very likely, indeed!" declared Patricia, as she arose and left the library, attended by Gerald.

They found Gertrude still in the pleasant morning room, seated at a writing-table covered with papers. She glanced up quickly at her husband's face as she saw him enter with Patricia, and taking her cue from his composed look, and willing herself to ignore all painful subjects, she arose with smiling courtesy to receive her visitor.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear Patricia. I hope you have come to pay us that promised week's visit," were the words of her greeting as she took the hand of the girl.

"Well, no, I don't come with any such intention. I just jumped upon Jenny's back and galloped up here by one of my sudden impulses. But really, now that I *am* here if *you* wouldn't mind sending a man down to Greenwood to fetch my clothes, *I* wouldn't mind stopping for a few days," answered Pat., tapping her boot with her riding-whip, and thinking within herself: "Yes, I *will* stay here now, if only to prove to that false, anonymous correspondent of mine, that I, at least, utterly despise his slanders! Moreover, when Sallust and I are married, which I am determined we shall be all the sooner for this calumny, Gerald himself shall give me away and our honeymoon shall be spent at one of Gertrude's manors."

"I will send Hannibal at once for your effects, dear Patricia," said Gertrude, pulling the bell-cord.

"That's a good fellow! I knew you would," added Patricia, drawing off her gloves and flinging them, with her hat, to another table quite across the room.

"Just take my place here, dear, and write a list of the articles you wish brought," said Gertrude, indicating the seat at the writing-table, from which she herself had arisen a few minutes before.

"Oh, bosh! I can't do that; it is too much bother!

Just please send a verbal message by Hannibal to mother, telling her that I am going to stay here until further notice, and asking her to tell Nanny to pack my little trunk with all I may require; that will do. And, oh! if you have got such a thing as a good novel, please send it to Aunt Sue! She is awfully hard up for something to read. So hard up for a hero, too, that she is trying to make one out of old Dr. Goodwin, on the ground of his London adventures in search of Gabriel Haddon's lost daughter! Yes, he actually comes over to Greenwood three times a week, and Aunt Sue receives him—*alone*, mind you! And Lord knows what the upshot of it will be if we don't find her a novel with a military hero in it as an offset to her ministerial one!"

"Here is the very article," said Gertrude, as she went and brought from a bookstand a couple of volumes bound in blue morocco. "'*Ivanhoe*,' with half a dozen martial heroes in it to choose from."

"The very identical thing!" exclaimed Patricia. "I do hope she will fall deeply in love with Ivanhoe, otherwise—"

"Well? 'Otherwise'—what will then happen?" smilingly demanded Fitzgerald.

"Why, my—dear, old maiden aunt may be Mrs. Rector in six months!"

"Is that so? Why, I thought it was the other sister—the widow—that the good doctor was taken with," observed Gerald Fitzgerald, with a smile.

"Who?—my mother? Let me catch him at it, that's all!" exclaimed Pat, with dangerous looking eyes.

"Well, and if you were to catch him at it, what would happen!" inquired Gerald.

"Oh, nothing much! Only he would have to buy a wig and a set of teeth, and have several bones set, and be fed with a spoon, after I have settled accounts with him!"

"Whee—ew! You little *she tigress!* If ever I should be a widower, I should never dare to court your mother, that is very certain!" laughed Fitzgerald.

"My mother would not have married the very best man that ever drew breath, even when she was a very young widow. It is not likely that she would marry any one in her decline of life, Cousin Gerald," said Patricia,

with a sudden gravity that made her look so unlike herself that Fitzgerald felt very much like begging her pardon for his jest, but was relieved of the duty by the opportune arrival of old Hannibal, who put his venerable white head in at the door, and stood waiting orders. Gertrude gave him his instructions relative to going after Miss Patricia Fitzgerald's trunk, and the old man bowed and withdrew.

"Send Meta here, if you please, Hannibal," added the little lady, as he disappeared. The old man bowed again in retiring. In a few moments the lady's-maid came as called.

"Meta, show Miss Patricia to the room she has been accustomed to occupy when here, and attend to all her wants. Patricia, my dear, lunch will be ready in the breakfast-room at two," said our little lady, as she reseated herself at the writing-table.

Patricia followed her conductress from the room, and Gertrude was left alone with her husband. She did not recur to the painful subject of the morning, but took Captain Wailes's letter and her answer to it, and put both in his hands, saying:

"Please read these, and tell me what you think of them."

He took them, with a grave smile, and read them in their order. Then he returned them to her, saying:

"I think they are perfect, as far as they go; but, little love, I must also write to this brave old seaman, and add my prayers to yours that he will come and make us a visit."

And he sat down, took pen, ink, and paper, and dashed off an earnest, cordial letter of thanks and invitation to the old captain of the *Becky*. This he put in the same envelope with Gertrude's, and then sealed up and directed it for the mail-bag, and finally rang the bell. Jubal came in answer to the summons.

"You must take this to Wildeville, and ride fast in order to be in time for the five o'clock mail," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he handed the bag to his messenger. Jubal took it, bowed, and retired.

"I am glad Patricia has come, for I may have to go up to Washington for a few days, and she will be an agreeable companion for you, Gertrude, during my enforced

absence," said Gerald, as soon as the servant had withdrawn.

A look of such disappointment, distress, and even terror came over the little lady's face, that he hastened to add:—

"Do not be alarmed, little girl. I remember our mutual pledge in meeting; that we should never voluntarily part again! I do not intend to leave you here, even for a few days, while I go to the city; but to take you with me, and to ask Patricia to accompany us, that she may be with you at the hotel during the few hours when business must call me elsewhere. What do you say to that plan, Gertrude?"

"Oh, Gerald, it will be so very pleasant! And Patricia has never yet seen Washington or any other city. She will be delighted! You are so thoughtful of other people's happiness, dear Gerald!"

"If I am, it is you who have taught me to be so, little love."

"Here comes Patricia," hastily muttered Gertrude, as 'Pat. Fitz.,' entered the room; for she did not wish that sarcastic mocking-bird to overhear any of Gerald's tender speeches to herself.

"Didn't somebody say lunch would be ready at two? It is now five minutes past, and I am hungry enough to eat the whole of Ben Bowers, if he were properly cooked!" exclaimed Pat., as she came forward and threw herself into a chair.

"Lunch is quite ready now, my dear. I was just about to send for you. Come," said Gertrude, rising and leading the way to the dining-room, followed by Gerald, with Patricia on his arm.

It was while they were at the lunch-table that Gerald Fitzgerald revived the subject of their trip to Washington, and Gertrude invited Patricia to be of their party. The girl very eagerly accepted the invitation, adding:

"Besides, my Sally is there, and after being parted from him over three years, I cannot bear to have him go away even for three days. And now he has been nearly three weeks in the city on Geraldine's business! I shall be glad to go up, even for the sake of seeing him, poor dear goose! to say nothing of the delight of seeing the

city. Oh, of course I shall have to ask mamma's consent, though. A mere matter of form, you know, for she would never dream of denying me anything I had set my mind on, however absurd; and in this case, I know she will be glad to indulge me, for her judgment will go with her affections. When do we start?" she inquired, turning to Fitzgerald.

"On the day after to-morrow," answered Gerald.

"So soon? Then I must write a note and send it over by one of the boys to-morrow morning," said Patricia, as they all arose from the table.

Later in the evening old Hannibal returned, bringing Patricia's well-packed trunk from Greenwood. The next morning the girl sent off her note to her mother, and in the afternoon received Mrs. Doy's answer, most graciously thanking Colonel and Mrs. Fitzgerald for their kind invitation to Patricia, and readily giving the latter leave to accept it in its fullest terms. The same afternoon Patricia overhauled her well-filled trunk, but groaned over its contents.

"My outfit is good enough for Wilde county, but will hardly do for Washington in the height of the season," she muttered to herself.

"Never mind your wardrobe, dear Patricia; you can have it thoroughly renovated in the city. Why, you can get the most elegant dresses in the latest style, already made in Washington. You can get everything you need there," said Gertrude, encouragingly.

"Yes, everything but the money," commented Patricia.

"Never mind the money either, dear. You are my cousin and my guest. You must let me be your mamma for the occasion," added Gertrude.

"My mamma! You my mamma!" exclaimed Patricia, and overcome by the absurdity of the idea, she broke into a hearty fit of laughter. But that projected visit to Washington was not destined to take place just at that time, and for a very serious reason that must be explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GERTRUDE'S AVENGER.

ON the same afternoon that Gertrude and Patricia held their little debate over the latter's deficient wardrobe, Gerald Fitzgerald rode down to Wildeville, to see his attorney on business relating to the distant manors of which Gertrude had become the possessor. He soon dispatched his business, and then stepped into the reading-room of the hotel to look over the papers, while his horse was resting and feeding. The reading-room communicated with the public refreshment-room by wide, folding doors, that always stood open. Colonel Fitzgerald had happened to seat himself near the open doors. Within the other room, and only a few feet distant from him, sat a small party of four gentlemen around a table. They were engaged in drinking, smoking, and talking. The tone of their conversation was loud, and its style coarse. Colonel Fitzgerald could not avoid hearing much more of it than he liked, although he paid little attention to it until these words fell upon his startled ear:

"Talking of beauties, what is this report going around the county about this fair ferry-girl Fitzgerald married? Is it true that he was so deucedly taken in by her?" inquired one.

"Oh, I don't know! I suppose she was no better, nor worse than her class. What can a gentleman expect when he marries beneath him? Why, of course just this sort of an upshot. He ought to send the girl away and provide for her at a distance; or if he is so infatuated that he cannot give her up, he ought to *take*

her away to some distant part of the world where neither of them are known. This comes of a man of family marrying a miserable ferry-girl."

"But she is *not* a miserable ferry-girl," spoke up a third, "It is proved that she is the daughter of the late Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, and the granddaughter of Lilian Vale, making her, through both sides of her family, one of the richest heiresses in Virginia! Believe me, Fitzgerald knew what he was about when he jilted his cousin, Geraldine, and took her!"

"Oh, yes, I have heard that story, but I don't believe a word of it," said the fourth speaker. "It is a mere weak invention of the Fitzgeralds to cover her want of family and respectability; but how they will cover her want of character remains to be seen!"

"Ay, indeed, that will be a most difficult thing to do; for whatever may be the truth or falsehood of these latter stories, I *know* of my own personal knowledge that this young scamp, Rowley, *was* her lover before her marriage with Fitzgerald, and that on *one* certain night, during the absence of her grandfather and her servant, she received him alone at the ferry, refusing even to take the boat across the river to a party of travellers who waited on the opposite shore exposed to the stormy weather, while she entertained her lover to supper!"

This was terrible! This was maddening! Gerald Fitzgerald could bear no more. He started to his feet, dashed his hand to his brow for one moment, as if to arouse his half-stunned faculties, and then strode into the adjoining room and struck the same hand heavily upon the shoulder of the last speaker. The startled man sprang to his feet and whirled around, confronting Fitzgerald with an amazed and indignant stare.

"You have just uttered a base and malignant falsehood, sir! I demand that you retract your words on the spot!" exclaimed Gerald Fitzgerald, throwing down his card before the face of the man.

"I shall make no retraction, Colonel Fitzgerald. The words I have spoken are, unfortunately for yourself, the words of truth! I am ready to maintain them; there is my card," said the latter.

"Very well, Mr. Fergus McGregor!" said Gerald Fitzgerald, as soon as he had read the name on the bit of pasteboard, "there can be but one way of settling this matter. I shall send a friend to you, whom you will please to refer to some one with whom we can arrange the terms of our meeting!" And with these words Colonel Fitzgerald strode from the room, before any among the panic-stricken party who sat at the table, could recover sufficient presence of mind even to attempt to preserve the peace.

He called for his horse, and threw himself into the saddle, with the intention of galloping over to Greenwood to engage the services of Royal Greenleaf, upon whose hearty co-operation he knew he could rely. But he was scarcely settled in his stirrups when the very man he wanted to see rode up to the inn door and dismounted.

"Ah, Fitzgerald, you here? Good-morning. But what the deuce is the matter? You look as pale as a ghost and as grim as a fiend!" exclaimed honest Roy, as he threw the reins of his horse to a groom and came up to the side of Gerald.

"I was just going in search of you, Royal. I am very glad of the happy chance which has brought you here, and saved time. Come into the house with me, and I will explain," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he also dismounted and threw the reins to a hostler.

"Why, what in the blue dees is up now?" demanded the amazed Mr. Greenleaf.

"We must get a private sitting-room. Then I will tell you," replied Gerald Fitzgerald, in an agitated voice.

"Here, waiter! Show the Colonel and myself to a private parlour immediately, and look sharp!" exclaimed the practical Mr. Greenleaf to a passing darkey.

The man instantly stopped, rubbed his head, and then, as if he had rubbed the meaning of the order into it, bowed and respectfully led the way to a little eight-by-six sitting-room, the door of which he opened with a grand flourish.

"Pen, ink, and paper here immediately," said the Colonel, as he took one of the four chairs and seated

himself at the only table the sparely-furnished little room could boast. The waiter went out to obey the order, and then Royal Greenleaf drew a second chair to the table, seated himself, and said:

"Now, tell me what in the dee's name all this means!"

"It means that I have just caught a man whom I mean to bring to account for slander!" grimly replied Fitzgerald.

"Ah-h!" exclaimed Royal Greenleaf, with a snort of a steed that smelleth the battle afar off. "Tell us all about it."

Gerald Fitzgerald related the conversation he had overheard in the refreshment-room, and told what had followed it. He spoke in a voice hoarse with emotion, and ended by bitterly exclaiming:

"But the thought—the thought that the name of my most innocent and most honoured wife should be bandied about in a bar-room, among a set of fellows who falsely call themselves—gentlemen! Oh, it is unutterably galling!"

"Make an example of one or two of them, and end the thing forever! All this really cannot hurt Gertrude the least in the world! She is known now to be the daughter and heiress of Lloyd Fitzgerald, and to be the descendant and heiress of Lilian Vale; on either side of her family the richest woman in Virginia; on both sides combined the richest one in America. She is too strong in her family descent, in her wealth, and above all in her position as your wife, Gerald, to be the least affected by these envious scandal-mongers. But *they* should be severely punished, for all that, and I am very glad you have got one of them. I am to be the bearer of your challenge, I suppose."

"Yes."

"All right. The sooner the better. Ah, and here comes Lucius with the stationary," said Mr. Greenleaf, as the waiter entered with a quire of note-paper, a packet of envelopes, inkstand, and pens, all of which he deposited on the table.

"That will do, Snowball. Now make yourself scarce, and keep away until called for!" exclaimed Royal.

The darkey made a grab at his front wool by way of a bow, and left the room.

"Now then, Gerald, fire away!" exclaimed Royal, pushing the writing materials across the table to his friend.

Colonel Fitzgerald dipped a pen in ink, drew a sheet of paper before him, and hastily dashed off his challenge. Then he pushed it across the table to his second, who took it up, read it, and remarking:

"That will do, Gerald," put it into an envelope and directed it.

"You will find your man in the refreshment-room, where I left him about half an hour ago," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"All right; I will go for him now," replied Royal Greenleaf, as he took his hat and went out.

Gerald Fitzgerald folded his arms upon the table, and dropped his head upon them in profound and painful thought.

He was no professional duellist. He had never fought a duel in his life before; never had challenged or been challenged by any man. He was no duellist then, even though a brave soldier and a distinguished officer. He was, on the contrary, a man of the deepest moral sensibility—of the most conscientious principles—as well of the finest sense of honour.

The necessity that forced him to meet a fellow being in deadly combat for a private quarrel, was to him exceedingly painful and embittering. The thought of the sorrow he might bring upon his sinless Gertrude, added "gall and wormwood" to pain and bitterness.

Besides, he abhorred the duellist. He was a man without fear, as he had often proved himself on the field of battle; but all his moral and religious principles arose against the thought of the duel.

Yet, with his military notions, and the traditions and usage of gentlemen, he could see no honourable way out of his terrible dilemma. His wife's fair fame had been questioned, and he must challenge and slay, or be slain by the man who had dared to question it.

There seemed no alternative. He felt this, and lifted up his head and nerved himself to the occasion.

Royal Greenleaf did not keep him waiting long; but in about twenty minutes re-entered the room with a light step, a bright look, and a buoyant manner.

"Well, old fellow, it is all settled!" he said, as he gaily threw himself into a chair opposite Gerald. "The man wouldn't retract his words—he would die first! He said he couldn't, in fact, because he had spoken the truth, and would stand or fall by it. It is a pity for him, for he seems to be a fine frank fellow enough; but hallucinated on this subject, somehow or other."

"Well, Royal, what arrangements are concluded for the meeting?" inquired Fitzgerald.

"I am going to explain. When I had handed him your 'full defiance, hate, and scorn,' as represented by your challenge, I requested him to refer me to some friend who could arrange with me the terms of the meeting. He named Mr. William O'Rourke, there present. We two seconds bowed ceremoniously, and at once retired to a distant table and went to business!" said Mr. Greenleaf, briskly rubbing his hands.

"You do not mean to say that you discussed these matters at a table in the public refreshment-room?" demanded Fitzgerald, in surprise.

"Certainly; why not? What odds?" inquired Royal, raising his eyebrows.

"Greenleaf, were you ever engaged in a duel before?" gravely questioned Fitzgerald.

"No," answered Roy, a little abashed at having to confess his inexperience. "No, I never was engaged in an affair of honour before. But what of that? There must be a first time for everything, a first time for a man to be married, or murdered, or hanged, or anything! I dare say I shall get well posted after a while."

"I dare say you will!" answered Fitzgerald, grimly. "But now, what are the arrangements?"

"Well, you are to meet in the glade in Warlock Woods, behind St. Benedict's churchyard, at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. Your weapons are to be pistols. You are to stand north and south, that the sun may be equally divided between you, and at ten paces from each other. O'Rourke, as the second of the

challenged party, is to give the signal—one!—two!—three!—and fire! At 'one,' you are to face about; at 'two,' to raise your arms; at 'three,' to take aim; at 'fire,' you are to blaze away. There, those are the items in our arrangements. There are a few trifling details that you may find in this memorandum when you have time to study it," said Royal, as he placed the paper in Gerald's hands.

"Now, Greenleaf, I must go home. There is much for me to do between this and seven o'clock to-morrow morning. What is the hour?" said Gerald, as he consulted his watch. "It is three o'clock. Yes, very much to do, and but sixteen hours to do it. Let us go." The two gentlemen went out.

"Now, Gerald, step to the bar and pay our bill, while I leave an order with my tailor. I will join you at the door," said Greenleaf. Gerald complied with the request, and called for their horses. When the horses came up, Royal and Gerald mounted and rode away, taking the Eagle Roost Ridge Road that led to the landing opposite Haddon's Ferry House.

"Will you go home with me and sleep at the Summit, so as to be on hand to accompany me to the duelling ground to-morrow morning?" asked Gerald, as they rode along.

"Well, no; I have invited some gentlemen to supper and cards to-night, and can't get out of the engagement. But I will be on the ground at seven o'clock to-morrow, punctually, to meet you. Will that do?"

"Thanks, yes. Then this ride will be the last chance we shall have of speaking confidentially before the event. And now, dear Royal, I have the deepest trust in your fidelity and generosity, and I ask you, in case I should fall—"

"Bosh!" interrupted Royal, "you are not going to fall, because you have right on your side. The other fellow will fall—"

"Perhaps; but let me finish what I was saying. In the event of my falling, Royal, I commit my beloved wife to your charge. Will you be a brother to her, Royal—to her who will have neither husband, father, nor brother to care for her? Will you be as a brother to her, Royal?"

"That I will. Be brother, father, or—or husband to her either, if you prefer the latter, though I am not in the habit of marrying," briskly answered Mr. Greenleaf.

"No, you need not go as far as that in your sacrifices for the sake of friendship," said Gerald, with a faint smile. "Nor, indeed, could you or any other man ever fill that relation to my widowed Gertrude," he added, gravely.

"What! you would not be so selfish as to want her to live a widow all her life, young and pretty as she is, would you?"

"Yes, I would. Besides, she would do it in any case. But let us cease this discussion. It is not pleasant," muttered Fitzgerald, discontentedly.

"*You* began it, you know," good-humouredly retorted Royal.

They were now descending the steep bride-path leading down to the Eagle Roost Landing, opposite Haddon's ferry-house, and the difficulties of the descent required all their attention for the time being.

In ten minutes they reached the water's edge, and dismounted. Royal Greenleaf held the two horses while Gerald went into the boathouse and found the horn, and blew a blast upon it, following this up with the old familiar call of—

"BOAT! BOAT! FLAT BOAT!"

Soon came John Brooks response, bawled across the water: "ALL RIGHT, and the flat-boat it is!"

And soon he was seen pulling from the opposite shore.

He crossed slowly, poling his awkwardly floating platform, until he pushed it up to the sands on which Colonel Fitzgerald and Mr. Royal Greenleaf stood holding their horses. He took off his hat to the two gentlemen, and stood waiting orders.

"You are not as young as you used to be, old man. You require some help at your work. We will have to get an active boy for you," said Colonel Fitzgerald, kindly, as he led his horse on the boat, followed by Royal Greenleaf, leading his.

"No, I thank you kindly, Marse Colonel. No boys for *my* work. I don't want no fare o' mine drownded in the Wilde, along of the carelessness of boys!" said the boatman.

Gerald Fitzgerald gave the reins of his horse to Royal Greenleaf, and took up the second pole and helped the boatman to push the flat-boat off. They reached the landing at Haddon's Ferry House as the sun was setting.

"Won't you go up to the house, Marse Colonel?" inquired John Brooks, hospitably.

"No, not now, John. We are in haste to get on," replied Colonel Fitzgerald, as he mounted his horse and joined Royal Greenleaf. They went on together to the cross-roads, where their paths diverged. Both drew rein and paused.

"At seven to-morrow morning," said Fitzgerald.

"At seven punctually," replied Royal Greenleaf.

And they galloped off on their several ways.

It was dark when Gerald Fitzgerald rode up to the door of the Summit Manor House and dismounted.

"Where is your mistress?" he inquired of the hall footman.

"Mist'ess is in de drawing-room, sir," replied the boy —"which she have been waitin' dinner for you, sir, more'n an hour," he further communicated.

"Say to her that I am sorry she has waited, and that dinner may be served at once, and I will join her in the dining-room in a few minutes," said Colonel Fitzgerald, as he went to his dressing-room to make his toilet, before presenting himself to his unsuspicious Gertrude.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DUEL.

"A duelist always values himself upon his courage, his sense of honour, his fidelity and friendship. HUME.

GERALD FITZGERALD entered the dining-room with every trace of disturbance smoothed from his brow. He found the soup on the table, and Gertrude and Patricia standing by their chairs, waiting for him to join them.

"I regret to have kept you waiting, ladies," he said.

"It is of no consequence. We were so happily engaged we did not miss you," answered Patricia.

"Which means that we are ready for our flitting to-morrow, Gerald! Even your valise and travelling dressing-case packed. I suppose you have been able to secure places in the morning coach," said Gertrude.

"No, dear," replied Colonel Fitzgerald. "Some unexpected business has turned up which must claim my attention to-morrow; but next day I hope I shall be free to take you to Washington for a few weeks. I trust you are not much disappointed."

"Oh, no!" answered Gertrude.

"What difference does one day make?" added Patricia.

Then they addressed themselves to the good things before them. After dinner they went into the drawing-room, where coffee and tea were served. When the tray was removed they engaged in conversation until nine o'clock, when Patricia withdrew to her own chamber. As soon as the young lady had left the room Gerald went

to the sofa where Gertrude sat, and placing himself by her side, said:

"I like our little Cousin Patricia, but I am glad she has gone to bed, so that we may have the rest of the evening to ourselves, dearest." She raised her eyes to his face, and then, seeing the anxious look that he could not wholly banish, she said:

"You are not well, Gerald. Does your head ache, too? Shall I get you anything?"

"Nothing, dear. I am well; only fatigued, and worried with business," he replied.

"I know. No good ever comes unattended with trouble, does it, Gerald? And our large inheritance brings its share," she said.

"You are right, dear," he answered, "but now let us forget business. Come, give me some music."

He opened the piano for her. She played and sang his favourite pieces, while he turned over the leaves of the music-book. So this evening passed until the clock struck eleven. That was their hour for retiring to rest.

"Stop now, love. You have given me a pleasant hour, but you are weary," he said.

She arose with a smile. Then he lighted a candle, and put it in her hand, saying:

"Go to rest, dear. Do not wait for me. I have letters to write, which will occupy me to a late hour."

"May I not sit by you, Gerald, while you write them?" she asked.

"No, Gertrude," he answered. "I must be alone. God bless you, darling; go to bed and sleep. Good-night."

Then he kissed her tenderly, and dismissed her with a smile that she answered, kissing her hand to him as she fled up the stairs. He gazed after her until she had disappeared, and he muttered to himself:

"Is that the last, last sight I shall ever see of her sweet face? I will go after her! No, no, that would be weakness! I must not think of her—the thought would unman me!"

With these words he crossed the hall, and entered

his study. He rang for his servant. Jubal obeyed the summons.

"I wish you to have the carriage ready at five o'clock to-morrow morning. Bring it to the gate near the porter's lodge. When it is ready, come to me in this room, so as not to disturb the household. Do you understand?" inquired Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Yes, sir," answered the man.

"Tell Junius to put out the lights and close the house. I shall not want anything out of this room to-night."

Gerald Fitzgerald remained with his elbow resting on the mantelpiece, and his head bowed upon his hand; but he roused himself, and sat at his writing-desk, and drew pen, ink, and paper within his reach.

"I shall make no will," he said. "The manor and all within it is Gertrude's property, and my effects will fall to her. But I must write a farewell letter to her, in case of a fatal termination to this meeting, and—I must write to Dr. Goodwin and Miss Sue Greenleaf. I must enlist as many friends as I can to sustain the poor broken-hearted child I shall leave behind me—if I fall!"

With these thoughts he wrote a letter to Dr. Goodwin, explaining the circumstances that had led him into this unavoidable duel, and invoking his protection for Gertrude. He wrote to Miss Sue Greenleaf, referring her to her brother for an explanation of the circumstances, and commending his wife to her care. The writing occupied him until after one o'clock. He reserved his letter to Gertrude for the last. In this he poured forth the love of his soul, begging her to pardon him that he held their honour dearer than his life, or than her happiness, and so went forth to vindicate it at the risk of both. He filled page after page of this letter to Gertrude, and the clock struck four ere he had finished it. He folded it and placed it with the others, and locked them in a drawer of his writing-desk, resolving to take the key to Royal Greenleaf and leave it with him, that he might open the drawer and deliver the letters in case of necessity.

He longed to go up and gaze on Gertrude in her sleep; but he feared he should arouse her suspicions. So he stifled "the mighty hunger of his heart," and continued his preparations for the hostile meeting. He

took from the upper shelf of a closet his case of pistols, and examined them. He found them in order. He glanced at the little clock. It was fifteen minutes to five. Again the almost irresistible longing came over him to go and gaze on Gertrude's face as she slept, but he withstood the temptation, and sat down for the appearance of Jubal to announce the carriage. Scarcely five minutes had passed when there came a tap at the study door.

"Come in," said Colonel Fitzgerald. The door opened, and Jubal entered with his breakfast.

"The carriage is ready at the porter's lodge, sir," said Jubal, as he set the tray upon the table.

"I gave you no order for this refreshment," said Fitzgerald.

"I know you didn't, sir, but I thought you forgot, and so I prepared this myself, knowing you was a going to take a cold ride this raw morning, sir," answered Jubal.

"Thanks for your care," said Colonel Fitzgerald, who filled a cup of coffee and drank it off. He was too much absorbed in his painful thoughts to notice the tearful eyes, and troubled brow of the devoted lad who served him, and who more than suspected the fact of the impending duel.

Colonel Fitzgerald drank a second cup of the strong coffee. He drew on his overcoat, buttoning it under his chin; then he drew on his cap and his gloves; and he took his pistol-case under his arm, and warning Jubal to lock up the house after him, and on no account to disturb the sleeping family, he left the house by the main door and walked into the darkness of the dawn, and went down the avenue leading to the porter's lodge, where he found the carriage waiting for him. The coachman opened the carriage-door for his master.

"Drive to Haddon's Ferry; but when you get there, go on to the water's edge. You can take the carriage over in the flat-boat, without waking the boatman," said Fitzgerald.

"Yes, sar," replied the coachman, as he drove off.

Gerald Fitzgerald delivered himself up to the thoughts inspired by the occasion. He spoke but twice during

the drive to the ferry. Once he put his head out of the window to say:

"Drive fast!" And ten minutes later, when the horses were going at a great speed, he called out again:

"Faster! faster!" A drive of half an hour brought them to the river banks, and to the boat-house at Haddon's Ferry. Colonel Fitzgerald, with the assistance of his man, got out the flat-boat; then he took the poles and steadied the platform, while his servant led the horses, with the carriage, on to it. Then master and man began to propel the boat across the river. The first beams of the sun were sparkling above Eagle Roost Ridge when they landed on the sands.

"Secure the boat, and leave the carriage and horses on it, until further orders. Keep your eyes on them until my return," said Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Yes, sar," answered the discreet darkey. Gerald Fitzgerald took out his watch and looked for the time. It was a quarter past six.

"I shall be on the ground an hour too soon; but better so than to have risked a questioning from Gertrude, who is an early riser, if I had remained longer at home," he muttered to himself, as he walked down the shore until an indentation of the mountain brought him to a glen, surrounded by high cliffs, and bounded by the river. On this lovely spot stood the ruins of an old chapel, whose broken walls stood in the midst of a church-yard. Behind this chapel was an open glade, enclosed in forest trees.

"Everything speaks of life and joy to me, who come on an errand of death and despair," thought Gerald Fitzgerald, as he sat down at the foot of a tree. Again he consulted his watch. "Yes," he said, "I have an hour to wait here unless the others should arrive before their time. Greenleaf will be prompt. I hope he will be here before McGregor, that I may entrust the key of my writing-desk to his care with directions where to find my last letters. Ah! here comes some one," he exclaimed, as the sound of swiftly approaching footsteps broke on his listening ear.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GERTRUDE'S DISTURBED REST.

"Never believe, though in my nature reign'd
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stain'd,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;
For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Gertrude had been so lovingly sent away by Gerald, she ran upstairs, unconscious and unsuspicious of approaching evil. She found Meta in her dressing-room, ready to serve her.

"Lay my night-dress out, child, and go to Miss Patricia's room and ask her if her headache is better, and if you can do anything for her. If not, go to bed. I shall not want you any more to-night," said the matron.

Meta did as she was directed, and left the room. Gertrude offered up her evening's thanksgiving and prayers, and retired to bed, where she lay awake for a long time, thinking of Gerald hard at work "on that tiresome law business," and watching and listening for his approach.

At length she fell into a deep sleep. But not a refreshing one. Her sleep was soon disturbed by dreams full of terrors in which the past and present, the true and false, were mingled. At one time she saw Gerald perishing in the flames of a burning ship, while she was borne off in the grasp of a sailor, who was forcing her on

the life-boat. At another time she saw him abandoned on an island of ice, while she sailed away in safety. She saw him in the hands of the Indians, who had bound him to a tree, and were shooting poisoned arrows into his face, while she looked on, powerless to rescue him. Yet again she saw him in their home, with blood-stained hands, standing over his murdered victim, while the officers of justice were thronging about him, and his old servants weeping around him, and she stupified with horror. At this point of agony she awoke—awoke to hear the weeping she had heard in her dream. She could not for some moments clear her brain from the horrors of her sleep; but when she did, her first act was to thank Heaven that she had only dreamed. Yet the weeping continued. Whence could it come? Full of fear and trouble she arose and glanced at the clock.

"Half past five o'clock, and Gerald not up here yet? What can have happened? But he is in the house, and that is a comfort. He has probably fallen asleep over his work," she thought. At that moment her eyes fell on the form of Meta lying on the rug before the smouldering fire, and with her head all wound up in her apron, weeping softly.

"Why, Meta, what is the matter with you? Haven't you been to bed?" inquired Gertrude.

"Oh, mist'ess! Oh, mist'ess! Oh, mist'ess!" wailed the girl, bursting into loud and vehement sobs and tears.

"Have you got the toothache, Meta? I begged you to have that bad tooth pulled."

"N—n—no, mist'ess, 'tain't nuffin de matter with me—ee—ee!" sobbed the girl.

"What is it, then, Meta? Get up off the rug, and sit up, and let me see your face! Now tell me what ails you."

"Oh, mist'ess, I dare—dare—daren't!" cried Meta.

"I insist upon your telling me. Why have you not been to bed? And why do I find you weeping on the floor in my room?" inquired Gertrude.

"Oh, mist'ess, Jubal kill me!"

"Jubal! what has he to do with you? Tell me instantly."

"Oh, mist'ess! Oh, mist'ess! It's about mar—mar—marster!" said the frightened girl, bursting into renewed sobs.

"Your master! Is he not writing, or asleep in his study downstairs?" exclaimed Gertrude, in alarm.

"No, mist'ess, he is go—go—gone!" gasped the girl.

"Gone! where?" breathlessly demanded Gertrude.

"He's gone to fi-fi-fight a duel!"

"A DUEL!" exclaimed Gertrude, dropping into a chair, on the verge of fainting. "A DUEL! Heaven of heavens! it cannot be true! Who told you so, girl?"

"Ju-Ju-Jubal did, mist'ess," sobbed Meta.

"Where has he gone? With whom? Tell me all in a breath!"

"I do-do-don't know, mist'ess."

"Send Jubal to me instantly—instantly! Go!"

Meta sprang up and fled out of the room. Next moment Gertrude threw on her clothes in haste, and hurried to the study. A glance around the place showed her that Gerald must have left the house.

Jubal and Meta came into the house by the back door; when Gertrude called both of them to come quickly into her room.

"Jubal, tell me where your master has gone, and for what purpose! Meta, while he is doing this you must lose no time, but hurry to the stables, and tell one of the grooms to saddle Fly, and bring him here for my use—at once!—quick!" cried Gertrude.

Meta ran hurriedly out of the house to do her mistress's bidding.

Then Gertrude turned to Jubal.

"Now tell me all!"

"Oh, mist'ess," gasped the trembling boy, "marster nebber told me nothin'."

"So much the better, for you will betray no confidence. Tell me everything you know," she said, "where has your master gone?"

"To fight a duel, mist'ess."

"With whom?"

"With a Mr. 'Gregor."

"What for?"

"For sayin' unrespectful things about you, mist'ess."

"Great Heaven! When did he leave the house?" inquired Gertrude.

"At five o'clock, mist'ess."

"Half an hour ago! Where is this meeting to take place?" asked Gertrude.

"In the Fairy Ring, behind the old ruined church in Eagle Woods, mist'ess."

"I *may* overtake him and prevent this madness yet!" exclaimed Gertrude, as Meta came into the house, saying:

"The horse will be at the door in five minutes."

"Then run to my room and get my hat and riding-habit at once, Meta, I will put them on down here."

The girl fled upstairs on her errand.

"Jubal, tell me how you learned about this duel," demanded Gertrude.

"It was after I had been to de pos' office las' night, I stopped at the hotel, an' de darkies was talkin' how de duel was goin' to be fought, 'cause Mr. 'Gregor wouldn't tuck back his word what he had said unrespectful, an' how Mr. Greenleaf an' Mr. Riley was to be the seconds, an' how dey had 'ranged all about it at de table, in de 'freshment-room, where de waiters heard 'em talkin' low, an' listened; an' so dey heered it all, an' tole me. But I didn't beliebe it, till I see marster gwinin' off dis berry mornin' 'fore dey, with his pistol-case."

A strange strength of resolution had come to Gertrude. Having heard this story she accepted it as truth, and had but one more question to ask:

"How did Colonel Fitzgerald go to this meeting?"

"In de carriage, mist'ess, with de brown horses," answered Jubal.

"Then I can overtake him on Fly!" she said. "Go and see if my horse is ready," she cried to Jubal.

She put on her riding-habit and hat, drew on her gloves, and hurried to the door, as her fleet horse was led up. She leaped lightly to her seat on the saddle. Then

she took the whip from Jubal, and started at full speed down the avenue. The gate was open, and she sped through it. There was a "short cut" to Haddon's Ferry by a bridle-path. Gertrude entered this, galloping wherever the ground permitted of such haste. By this means, she hoped to intercept Colonel Fitzgerald's carriage off the river-road, before it could reach Haddon's Ferry. So she would have done, had not Gerald had a half hour's start of her.

Gertrude reached the foot of the mountain and the edge of the Wilde in half an hour. But she saw no carriage before her. She flew down the river-road, and in another half hour reached Haddon's Ferry. She went to the boat-house, where, as she dismounted, she saw John Brooks gazing around in a state of consternation.

"Miss Gertrude!" he exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, but I am forgettin'! Here's somebody took the flat boat unbeknownst to me, and carried it across de riber!"

"Never mind, John. Colonel Fitzgerald took it. Get out my rowboat quicker than you ever did anything in your life, to row me over. Quick, John! It is a case of life and death!" she exclaimed.

The old negro laid himself to the oars, and the *Water Lily* sped across the river. On the other side they found the flat boat, with Gerald's carriage, horses, and coachman waiting.

"How long have you been here, Samson?" asked Gertrude.

"'Bout twenty minutes, mist'ess," said the negro.

"Wait here, John Brooks, until my return," said Gertrude.

She broke into a run and ran until she was out of breath—one fear giving wings to her feet!

"Ah, Heaven! if I should be too late! I—I—should arrive to find my husband murdered, or—a murderer!"

So, walking and running, she reached the ruins of the old chapel. Then springing over the graves, she entered the glen known as the Fairy ring. One glance around the scene showed her Colonel Fitzgerald, seated at the foot of a great oak tree. One ejaculation expressed her gratitude:

"Thank Heaven, I am in time!"

She stood before him, but could speak no more. He was so thunderstruck by her appearance on the scene, that he could only gaze on her in stupefaction. Then he clasped her to his bosom, one thought filling his soul —that he held her to his heart once again—once again, though he were destined to die within the next hour!

He did not dread her interruption of him. She must see, he thought, since she had in some manner unknown to him discovered his purpose and followed him to this spot, she must see that, being on the duelling ground, he had gone too far to retreat. Or if she did not see this, he could make her do so. He did not doubt his power over her, and her submission to his will. He would hold her to his bosom in this, perhaps, last embrace, and then —though it should cleave his heart in twain to do it—he would put her from him, and command her to go home. And she, he felt sure, though it might half kill her to do so, would obey him. These thoughts passed swiftly through his mind before he asked:

"Gertrude, why are you here, my child?"

She lifted her head from his bosom, placed her hands on his shoulders, and raised her beautiful eyes to his— her eyes ablaze with all the love, fire, power of her spirit—streams of light from the empyrean—pouring into his soul.

"Oh, Gerald! why are *you* here?" she retorted. "What are you about to do? To raise your hand against a man's life! To expose your life to his murderous shot! To kill, or be killed! Oh, Gerald!"

"Gertrude," he gravely replied, "a soldier holds his life or any other man's of little worth in comparison with honour."

"Yes, *honour!* But, oh, Gerald! what *is* honour? Is it honour to break the laws of the land that you are sworn to maintain? Is it honour to break the higher laws of Heaven that you are vowed to obey! No, Gerald, this is not honour. Nor is it for honour that you wait here for your adversary to slay or to be slain! Not for honour, but for *pride*, for PRIDE, the sin through which angels fell. Think, Gerald—you are a soldier! You know what a soldier's duty is! You would

not disobey the slightest order of your next superior officer. You are a Christian, a soldier of the Lord! You must not disobey your Divine Commander!"

While she spoke, she held his eyes, spell-bound, gazing into hers. When she ceased, he threw a rapid, restless glance over the ground. He dreaded the approach of any other party while Gertrude was with him.

"My child, you do not understand my position, nor is there time to explain it. Who brought you across the ferry?"

"John Brooks. But he will not take me back without you," she replied.

"Yes, but he will! You must go back with your servant, Gertrude. You must leave me when I tell you to do so."

"Never, Gerald! I am here to save you from sin or death! I will never leave you till I do so."

"My dear Gertrude, if my fair fame only had been questioned here, I might—I say, I *might*—have passed it over; but it is your spotless honour. A man must guard his wife's honour, Gertrude, even with his life. Yes, even with his soul, if it comes to that?" he earnestly declared.

She looked at him long and sadly, gravely shaking her head, and then she answered:

"Oh, Gerald, do you not know, with all your knowledge—do you not know that a woman's honour can only be guarded by the woman herself? Can only be kept or lost by herself? Your wife's honour needs no guardian but your wife, Gerald."

"Heaven, Gertrude! Do you know what this wretch whom I have challenged, has dared to say of you?" he vehemently demanded, while his restless eyes roved over the glen in search of some sign of the approach of others.

"No, I neither know nor care, at this moment, what is said or thought of me! I only know that you are waiting here to kill, or to be killed, for your wife's sake. I only care that your hand may remain as pure from blood-guiltiness as your wife's heart is from guile!" she earnestly replied.

"Gertrude, I must tell you, I must tell you, though the words burn my lips in the speaking—though they scorch your ears in the hearing! I must tell you, for then, when you have heard, you will see that you must leave me here to avenge such words with death!"

A rustle in the woods caught his startled ear; he looked keenly all around, but seeing no one he thought some wild animal had passed in the brushwood; he continued:—

"Listen, Gertrude—he says—he DARES to say—and to swear, that you had a lover before you married me, and that Sallust Rowley was your declared lover!"

"Well, what else? or was that all?" inquired Gertrude, with forced calmness.

"No, that was not all. He says that you received Sallust Rowley at the Ferry House, in the absence of your grandfather and your servants, and that he passed a night there."

"Well, and he tells the truth. Sallust Rowley was my lover, and he passed a night alone with me at the Ferry," answered Gertrude, quietly.

Gerald Fitzgerald turned white as death, and shrank from her aghast. Again there was a rustle in the woods near the path leading to the Wildeville turnpike, but he did not heed it.

"But if he says," continued Gertrude, "that Sallust Rowley was ever my accepted lover he tells an untruth. And if he says that spot or blemish fell upon my soul that night he slanders the noble boy who saved my life, and whom I esteem, and always shall esteem, to the end of my earthly days."

Still Fitzgerald gazed upon her, silent, motionless, and so absorbed as to be utterly unconscious of the footsteps approaching the glen from behind him.

"I should have told you all about this matter long ago, Gerald, but that the story would have involved something of self-glorification, for I did a brave deed that night, Gerald. I brought Sallust Rowley across the Wilde in the most terrific midnight storm I ever saw. The boy said that I had saved his life at the imminent risk of my own, and in his impetuous and eccentric manner, offered to marry me and raise me to wealth and position. I had

never seen the lad before. I looked upon him as a mild lunatic, and laughed at his proposals. I never saw him again until after he had rescued me from drowning in Dover's Straits on the night of the burning of the *Messenger*. That is all, Gerald."

Still he stood and stared at her with that fixed, white look.

Seeing this continue, her own face clouded over for a moment.

Then suddenly her brow grew radiant with faith, and holding out both hands she approached him, saying:

"I am blameless! Oh, Gerald, you *know* that I am blameless! I could not be otherwise. How *could* I be otherwise? It is not in my nature. There, take my hands in yours. You *know* that I could not offer them to you if I were not blameless!"

He came out of his cataleptic state, and took her hands and pressed them to his lips, and to his heart, saying:

"I know that you are innocent in thought, word and deed, my darling. But your truthful admissions have so stupefied me, that I know not into what fatal self-forgetting imprudence your very innocence and goodness may have led you—giving a weapon into the hands of the envious and malicious wherewith to wound your fame to the death. They have slandered you, my white dove. They have assailed your honour, my wife. I am here to vindicate you!"

"Oh, Gerald," she said, raising her eyes, eloquent with the inspiration of love and truth—"Oh, Gerald, have I not told you that a woman's honour can only be guarded by the woman herself? Can only be kept or lost by herself? No slanderer can hurt it. No champion vindicate it."

Fitzgerald could not bear the light of her eyes on the fixed purpose he held in his heart. His glances shifted restlessly. He turned his head, and in doing so, for the first time caught sight of his antagonists, Fergus McGregor and William O'Riley, standing a short distance off.

He hastily put her from him, exclaiming:

"Gertrude, my wife, you must not hinder me. You

must not remain here one moment longer. Go! I must meet these men."

But she suddenly threw her arms around his neck and gazed into his eyes.

He averted his head and tried to unclasp her hands, saying, sternly:

"Gertrude, I COMMAND you, and by your vow of obedience I adjure you to leave me!"

But his lamb for meekness was now a lion for firmness. She refused to be commanded. She declined to obey. She clung to him for dear life.

"You shall not fight this duel!" she said. "You shall not kill this man, or be killed by him! I will stay with you until this is saved!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SAVED.

I WOULD I could
Quit all offences with as clear excuse
As well as, I am doubtless, I can purge
Myself of many I am charged withal,
Yet such extenuation let me beg,
As, in reproof of many tales devised
By smiling pick-thanks and base news-mongers,
I may, for some things true, wherein my tongue
Hath faulty wander'd and irregular,
Find pardon on my true submission.

SHAKESPEARE.

AT this crisis Gertrude found an abettor where she had least reason to expect one; for to her extreme surprise, Mr. Fergus McGregor, the challenged man, came forward, raised his hat and stood before them, with an expression of frank admiration on his fine open countenance, that could not be mistaken.

Gertrude, in some confusion, released her hold on her husband, and stood quietly by his side.

Fergus McGregor bowed, and, undismayed by the frowning brow and rigid lips of his challenger, said with gentlemanly candour and moral courage:

"Colonel Fitzgerald, I feel now that I have very much for which to apologize and to beg pardon of you and of this lady. First for the rash and reckless words spoken over the wine yesterday, and which I now desire to retract. Secondly, for being an unintentional witness to this interview and explanation between

you, which, however, I cannot regret, since it has so opened my eyes to a great truth in regard to this lady's worth."

Then turning to Gertrude, with a deepened reverence in his tone and manner, he added:

"I have no words to express to you, madam, the shame and contrition I feel in having so widely misapprehended and misrepresented you. I can only most humbly beg your pardon."

Gertrude, with a smile, held out her hand to him.

He took it, raised it to his lips, bowed over it, and dropped it. Then he turned to Colonel Fitzgerald, who had not yet answered.

But here William Riley struck in good-humouredly, exclaiming:

"Come, come, Colonel Fitzgerald! If you are quite spoiling for a fight you must take it out of some other party, not out of us, for we won't stand up in a bad cause."

"And you must find another second, too," chimed in the voice of Royal Greenleaf, who had joined the little circle, quietly, "for when a man has so honourably apologized, there is nothing left for us but to accept the apology."

"Certainly," assented Colonel Fitzgerald. "Mr. McGregor, will you do me the honour to take my hand. I shall be happy to improve the acquaintance of a man who has the moral courage to acknowledge his error as you have done."

The late antagonists shook hands heartily, and then Mr. McGregor said:

"It was this angel of peace who brought me to my senses, sir. I could not look upon her face, hear her tones, without knowing her for—*herself*. That is the highest praise I, or anyone can bestow on her."

Gertrude was so confused by this praise, that she could not lift her eyes from the ground, but stood like a culprit receiving a lecture.

Royal Greenleaf took pity on her, and suddenly turned the conversation by inquiring:

"Does anybody know what o'clock it is?"

Mr. Riley, the most disengaged man on the ground, consulted his watch, and answered:

"Ten minutes after eight."

"That's it. That's my time, too, and I was here at eight o'clock punctually; though being the last on the ground, I had feared that my time was slow, and caused me to be behindhand. Well, gentlemen, what do you say? Are we all ready for breakfast? My house, though not very near, is yet nearer than Wildeville or the Summit Manor. Will you, therefore, all do me the honour to accompany me home to breakfast?"

This hospitable invitation was thankfully declined by Messrs. McGregor and Riley, who pleaded that they had left their carriage, horses and servants, on the Wildeville turnpike, just beyond the close thicket that enclosed the glen, and therefore were under the necessity of returning to the village.

Colonel Fitzgerald then declared that he should stop to breakfast with his little lady at Haddon's Ferry, which was the nearest point of all, and that he should impress Mr. Greenleaf into their company.

Upon that the late antagonists shook hands again and parted.

Messrs. McGregor and Riley struck into the bridle-path leading through the thicket to the turnpike road where they had left their carriage.

Colonel Fitzgerald drew Gertrude's hand under his arm, and, accompanied by Royal Greenleaf, left the glen, by way of the old churchyard.

There, to the surprise of two of the party at least, they came suddenly upon Dr. Peter Shaw, sitting on a fallen tombstone, and tenderly nursing a case of surgical instruments, which he held upon his knee. He looked up very anxiously as the party came towards him.

"Hey, Doctor! upon my soul and honour I heartily beg your pardon, but I really had forgotten all about your being left here. It was because happily your skilful services were not required, you good physician. Gerald, you know I brought Dr. Shaw and left him here, in case he should be needed—as fortunately you have not been, Doctor. There has been an apology and a friendly settlement," said voluble Royal, glancing from one to the other and speaking from right to left.

"I am very glad to hear it, Mr. Greenleaf. And,

Colonel Fitzgerald, I congratulate you on the peaceful arrangement of this very vexatious affair."

"Thanks, Doctor. Thanks also, for your attendance here. We are going across to breakfast at the Ferry. Will you join us?"

"With pleasure, Colonel."

The whole party then picked their way over the uneven ground of the old churchyard, among sunken graves and fallen gravestones, until they came to the edge of the bank overhanging the river road. This they carefully descended to the water's edge, and then walked rapidly down the shore until they reached the spot where the boats were waiting for them.

On the flat-boat stood Colonel Fitzgerald's horses, in charge of his coachman, and John Brooks.

"I suppose you brought *that* over to this side to be handy in case you had to be taken back home wounded, but, bless you, we should not have put you in that. We should have laid you on a plank or a door," said the merciless Mr. Greenleaf, pointing to the coach.

"Colonel, if you will permit me to suggest, I think you had better take Mrs. Fitzgerald across in the little boat, and leave the flat-boat to me and Greenleaf, who can better bear with the horses," said Dr. Shaw.

"Thanks, yes, that will be best," assented Gerald Fitzgerald, as he handed Gertrude into the *Water Lily*, where she took a seat in the stern, while he untied the boat, pushed her off the sands and took up the oars.

"Gertrude, how did you get the knowledge of this intended duel?" inquired Gerald Fitzgerald, as they shot from the shore.

Gertrude told him of her being suddenly awakened from sleep by a terrible dream, and of her finding her maid Meta weeping on the rug; of her cross-examination of Meta, from whom she drew the news as the girl had heard it from her brother Jubal, who had obtained his information from the gossiping waiters of the Wildeville hotel.

The explanation was scarcely finished when the little boat, swiftly propelled by Fitzgerald's strong arms, reached the shore, where, near the big boat-house, stood the gig and horse which had brought Mr. Royal Greenleaf and Dr. Peter Shaw to the ferry.

"Shall you wait here for the others, Gerald?" inquired Gertrude, as she sprang ashore.

"Yes, dear, they are more than half across the river now, and will land before I have secured the boat," answered Colonel Fitzgerald.

"Then I will run up to the house and warn Jess, and help her, too, if needful. We must try to set a good breakfast before our guests," said Gertrude, as she opened the back gate leading into the luxuriant old-fashioned garden, and ran up the grassy walk, just noticing, as she passed, that the crocuses, "earliest infants of the spring," had already burst their bulbs, and were studding the grass with their gay, white, purple, golden, and variegated blossoms.

She ran around the back of the house to the kitchen door, and as she passed the window she saw Jess, in what was now her frequent attitude while watching her cookery—seated on a low chair before the fire with an open hymn-book in her hand, and singing a weird camp-meeting rallying hymn:

"Weeping Mary, she is gone;
Sinking Peter, he is gone;
Doubting Thomas, he is gone—
Gone to Canaan's Land."

"Jess!" said Gertrude, opening the door.

"Glory to goodness, honey, how you scare a body!" cried the old woman, jumping up and dropping her book—"comin' on one like a fief in de night."

"Now, how can you say like a thief in the night, Jess, when I come in the morning, letting in the sunshine as I open the door," inquired Gertrude, smiling, as she began to draw off her gloves.

"Well, den, like de Angel Gab'el blowin' his horn, or somefin sudden, anyways, and me no more lookin' for you dan de dead. But you allers drops right down on a body nowadays, Miss Gertrude. 'Here to-morrow and gone to-day,' as de ole sayin' says. Heap o' sense in dem ole sayin's. And dat's the way wid you. Not what I ain't glad to see you, honey. I mighty glad to see you any day or any way," added the old woman.

"Well, Jess, I have come to breakfast," said Gertrude, as she took off her riding hat and tucked up her habit. "What have you got, Jess?"

"De Lors a mercy on my poor ole black soul! Come to breakfast, and me onprepared! Is *him* 'long o' you, too?" asked Jess.

"Yes, 'him is 'long o' me,'" said Gertrude, laughing. "And two other gentlemen, besides, and they all want breakfast."

"Well, Lor! Dere's been nuffin' but eatin' and drinkin' and feastin' and carousin' here ebber since you hab been married, Miss Gertrude!" said Jess, with flagrant exaggeration.

"What have you got, Jess?"

"Why, on'y some coffee and cornpone and fried liver and bacon for me and John, if ebber dat good-for-nuffin' fellow comes back to his breakfas', which he has gone away ebber since daybreak dis mornin', and goodness knows where he is gone to!"

"Never mind, Jess! John Brooks will be here in a few minutes, and he can set the table while you and I get breakfast for the gentlemen. It will not be the first time, Jess. Lend me one of your kitchen aprons, and I will make some biscuits right away," said Gertrude.

"Why, Lors, honey, that will be just like ole times, you helpin' me in de kitchen, won't it?" said the old woman, catching the spirit of the occasion.

"'Just like old times,' Jess. And we must be quick, too! There are the gentlemen; don't you hear them coming into the parlour?"

"I hears Mr. Rowel Greenleaf! I'd hear *him* roarin' a mile off," said Jess.

At that moment John Brooks opened the kitchen door, and came in, drawing off the drift of Jess's discourse as a conductor carries off electricity.

"Oh, you's come, is you? Now, go right 'trai't inter dat parlour, and set de breakfas' table for de ge'men. And do it quicker'n you ebber did anyfing in your long, lazy lifetime, too! And den when de quality is all had dere breakfas' and gone, *den* I shall 'quire you to gib an account o' yerself—dere!"

"Aunt Jess," said John Brooks, very humbly, "I have had so much to do this morning. So many people have crossed the river, besides horses, and chariots, and men servants. If *you* had seen it, Aunt Jess, it would a minded you of 'Jordan's stormy banks!'"

"You shut up your mouf! What *you* know 'bout Jordan? A sinner like *you*. You take my 'vice and keep away from Jordan 'long as you can. You won't get no good by crossing ober. *You'll* nebber land on Canaan's happy shore!—not 'less you mend your ways, you won't—keepin' a body waitin' for dere breakfas' till 'most nine o'clock in de mornin'!"

John Brooks, to escape this tongue-lashing, without giving fresh offence, slipped a clean, damask cloth from out the dresser drawer, and sneaked off into the parlour to set the table.

Gertrude and her cook worked with such good-will, that in half an hour an excellent breakfast was smoking on the table, and our little lady, with every vestige of her culinary work removed from her dress, presiding over the coffee and tea.

While the party were at the table, the horses in the stable were rested, watered, and fed, and the servants in the kitchen were refreshed, so that when breakfast was over, the carriages were already waiting before the door to take their owners home.

Gertrude slipped into the kitchen to bid good-bye to old Jess and John Brooks, and then put on her habit, hat, and gloves.

Then Gerald handed Gertrude into the carriage and took his seat beside her, giving the order to the coachman to drive home.

Royal seated himself beside Doctor Shaw in the gig, then took the reins in his hands, and started his horse.

The way of the two vehicles lay together up the river-road, until they reached St. Patrick's Church, where they were to part company—Royal Greenleaf and Dr. Shaw going down to Greenwood, and Gerald and Gertrude going up to the Summit, where they found Patricia at the front door on the lookout for the carriage, and distracted with curiosity and conjecture as to their sudden and unexplained absence at so early and unexampled an hour in the morning before breakfast.

"And not a word of satisfaction to be got out of Meta, who does nothing but cry; or out of Jubal, who does nothing but blow his nose to prevent crying," she said, as she followed Gertrude into the hall. "And two visitors in the house besides."

"Two visitors!" exclaimed the little lady, glad to avoid answering the former part of her speech, and to seize on the latter.

"Yes, they came together, but that was an accident. They were fellow-passengers on the stage-coach from Washington to Wildeville."

"But who are they?"

"Why, my Sally and your Captain Wailes," cried Patricia, in great glee.

"Oh, I am so delighted. Oh, Gerald, Captain Wailes has come," exclaimed Gertrude, her eyes dancing with delight.

"I am as happy to hear it as you are, my darling," said Colonel Fitzgerald, heartily. Then turning to Patricia, he asked: "Where are these friends, that I may go and welcome them?"

"Oh, they are in the drawing-room, all right. In the absence of the master and mistress, I acted as lady of the manor, and assigned them rooms and attendance and gave them breakfast."

"Thanks! You are a little gem worthy to be worn by 'Sally,'" said Gerald Fitzgerald, as he hurried off to welcome his guests.

Gertrude flew upstairs to change her riding habit for a home dress, and then came down to the drawing-room, where she found the three gentlemen already engaged in an animated conversation.

On seeing her enter, the captain of the *Becky* jumped up, rushed across the room and caught her by both hands, exclaiming:

"My other little daughter! How delighted I am to see you! How far I have travelled to look upon your face again, and to make the acquaintance of your good husband!"

"Oh, Captain Wailes! You do not know how dearly we both love you, and how glad we are that you have come!" cried Gertrude, with tears of joy in her eyes.

"Well! when you have got through with all that, I would like to shake the tip of Cousin Gertrude's 'left-hand little finger,' if I might be permitted the privilege," said Sallust Rowley, meekly, rising and coming forward.

Gertrude laughingly disengaged her hands from those of Captain Wailes, saying:

"Take both, Cousin Sallust!" then suddenly changing her tone to one of deep earnestness, she added: "Dear Sallust! Words cannot express how glad I am to see you here!"

He pressed her hands, in turn, to his lips, and then handed her to a chair, and all the company at once resumed their seats.

A lively conversation ensued, in which no allusion was made to the events of the morning.

Indeed, neither Sallust Rowley nor Captain Wailes had heard any rumour of the intended duel, or entertained any suspicion that one had so nearly been fought, and so happily averted.

Sallust Rowley brought the news that Geraldine Fitzgerald had gone to Europe with the family of the recalled Prussian minister, and that the big German prince was in her train and more devoted than ever.

At one o'clock luncheon was served.

After they all arose from the table, Sallust and Patricia went off by themselves; and Gertrude asked to be excused, and retired to a consultation with her housekeeper, for she was anxious to set a most excellent dinner before her guests. Colonel Fitzgerald and Captain Wailes repaired to the drawing-room together.

As they sat there Captain Wailes said:

"I have heard a rumour, Colonel, that Stony Island, the estate I got with my wife, and which I had always believed her rightful property, is really the inheritance of your own little lady. Now I am a rude sailor, and no lawyer; but I have looked into this matter a little, and it does not require much legal learning to see that the direct lineal descendant of a landed proprietor, who dies intestate, is heir-at-law rather than a collateral kinsman, whereby I see plainly that Mrs. Fitzgerald is the true heiress of Stony Island, which I am ready to yield up at once, without the shadow of a contest."

"Captain Wailes—"

"A moment, Colonel! I wish to add that since it is shown that we have no right to it, I am glad—*glad*, I say—that it falls to the possession of your lovely wife, who has endeared herself to me as a daughter."

"Captain Wailes—"

"An instant longer, Colonel! I read your face! I know what you are about to say. Do not say it! I have enough, and more than enough, to provide comfortably for my two Rebeccas. The old *Becky* will take care of both! Do not let any misgivings about them trouble your enjoyment of your just inheritance!"

"Captain Wailes, let me ask you a question. Have you been served with a notice to quit possession?"

"Why, no, Colonel, and—"

"You never *will* be, Captain Wailes. And to secure you in the possession of Stony Island we shall execute a deed bestowing it upon you and your heirs forever."

"But, my dear Colonel, I could never consent to receive so munificent a gift—never!" exclaimed the captain of the *Becky*, rising in his excitement, and beginning to pace the floor with rapid strides. "I have no words now strong enough to speak my sense of your generosity, and I never should have power enough to repay it. Therefore I say that I cannot dream of accepting this princely gift."

Colonel Fitzgerald arose, and went and drew Captain Wailes's arm within his own, and joined him in his walk up and down the long drawing-room floor, saying earnestly:

"Captain Wailes, listen to me like the open-hearted sailor that we know you to be, and, if possible, hear me to the end without interruption. Stony Island is the familiar and beloved home of your wife and daughter. You were married there; all your children were born there; those whose spirits are in heaven died there; your sole remaining child, your dear daughter Rebecca, grew up there; and from every long sea voyage you return there. It is your haven of rest; and it has been in your possession so long that it is rightfully, if not lawfully, yours; so that neither my wife nor I would any more think of taking it from you than we would think of robbing a bank."

"But, Colonel Fitzgerald, it—"

"Stay, I have the floor. Hear me. I say that, under these circumstances, neither Gertrude nor myself could commit the great injustice of depriving you of Stony Island—even if we owed you no debt. But we owe you a

deep debt of gratitude that we can never hope to repay—a debt that will weigh upon our lives like a burden, and on our consciences like a sin, unless you allow us to lighten it in this way—"

"Avast there! I must speak. You owe me nothing. I did no more than my plain duty—no more than any shipmaster would have done—picked up a boat-load of ship-wrecked passengers and brought them into port. Your lovely little lady happened to be among them, that's all. Why, bless my soul alive! if every one of that ship-wrecked party should want to give me a farm, I should have more land than any man in America! But they do not, and I shall probably never see or hear of any of them again. Why should you wish to give me an estate more than any of the others, since I never did any more for your little lady than I did for them."

"In the first place, we do not want to 'give' you anything, you proud old sea-king! We only want to secure to you the legal possession of the estate which is already rightfully your own. In the second place, you did far more for the poor, little, ship-wrecked, desolated, and heart-weary woman than merely to pick her up from the life-boat," said the voice of Gertrude, as she came up quite unexpectedly behind them.

They all at once turned around smilingly to greet her heartily.

"Yes, Captain Wailes," she softly continued. "I have told my husband how you saved and persevered in saving me. I have told him all that you were to me on that tedious trying twelve months' voyage. I have told him how often my spirit sank and fainted within me; how often I despaired; how certainly I should have died if it had not been for you—if you had not constantly sustained and comforted me. Yes, sustained me with all the strength of a father, and comforted me with all the tenderness of a mother. But for you I should never have lived to see my husband's face again."

"And he knows it, Captain Wailes," added Gerald.

"Upon my word, I hadn't the least idea that I was such a good fellow. Neither do I think that either of my Rebeccas have!" exclaimed the captain of the *Becky*, with a humorous smile.

"I never said you were a good fellow. You are not a

good fellow at all. You are a proud egotistical old despot, who load people down with more obligations than they can stagger under, and then will not allow them to lighten the load ever so little, even by doing a simple act of justice. Now look here, Captain Wailes, my husband there can tell you that I am no 'patient Grizelda,' but that I have a will of my own when I choose to exert it."

"In short, she is a terrible little tyrant when she pleases to be so," added Gerald Fitzgerald, solemnly.

"Then I may know what to expect, if I venture to cross her humour," put in the captain of the *Becky*.

"Exactly," assented Gertrude. "And now listen. We shall surely execute that deed of gift to-morrow. Then, if you do not choose to stay at Stony Island—if you abandon that home of all your married life, *it shall be abandoned to ruin!* The doors and windows of the old house shall be thrown open to all the winds and weathers of heaven! Its roof shall shelter no human beings. Its gardens and fields shall be given up to woods and thistles; no fruit nor grain shall grow there for man or beast! The house shall become a wreck, and the farm a desert, if you refuse to live there and keep and cultivate it! That would be an awful sin, Captain Wailes, which you will surely never cause me to commit?" said Gertrude, with all the earnestness of her most earnest nature.

Tears stood in the old tar's eyes.

"Would you really do this?" he asked.

"Indeed I would. If the Island Farm is not to profit you and yours, it shall not profit any one."

"Indeed she will keep her word," added the Colonel.

"Well, I am clean out of my reckoning about this little craft. I took her to be a pretty little pleasure-yacht. I hadn't an idea she was an iron-clad man-o'-war bristling with great guns. Well, I see I must strike my colours," exclaimed the captain of the *Becky*, laughing through his tears.

"And *I* always thought you were a dear darling of an old sea captain, but I hadn't an idea that you were an angel," exclaimed Gertrude, in delight at having gained her point.

Captain Wailes suddenly seized the hands of the husband and wife, and while the emotions that he had long concealed under smiles and jests nearly choked his utterance, he would have thanked them for the princely gift that gave to his family the home they loved, but Gerald Fitzgerald stopped him.

"Let us say no more about this now. Here comes our young couple."

In a word, Sallust and Patricia entered the parlour, and conversation became general.

A week from this day Captain Wailes returned home with the deed of Stony Island in his breast pocket, to rejoice the hearts of his two dear Rebeccas with the news that they were to retain possession of their beloved home.

The trip to Washington was given up because Colonel Fitzgerald had now, in the absence of Geraldine, no motive for going there, and Patricia did not care to leave Sallust.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

How it all ended,
What fortune good or bad attended
The little lady your wish befriended.
BROWNING.

WITH the departure of Geraldine, the anonymous letters ceased to circulate, and the matter died away as falsehood ever dies.

At the end of his month's leave, Colonel Fitzgerald accompanied by Gertrude, returned to his regiment, at Wendover, where the little lady renewed her acquaintance with the young lieutenant whom she had met at the gate of the barracks on her first visit there, and who, having heard of her wondrous escape from shipwreck, now understood all that previously mystified him.

The Wendover Barracks was not nearly so desirable a

residence as the beautiful Summit Manor House; but the colonel's quarters were very pleasant after all, and so long as she was beside her husband, Gertrude could be happy anywhere.

Besides, in the officers' wives, she found agreeable young companions, and altogether life in the regiment was a gay novelty to her. The daily morning drill and evening parade, the weekly socials, the monthly balls, were all interesting to her; but most attractive of all to her nature, were the two Sunday services, at which the chaplain of the regiment, who was a gentleman of culture and refinement, officiated, and all the officers, with their families, and all the soldiers, except those on duty as sentinels attended.

Outside the regiment also, in the town and in the county, Gertrude formed many pleasant acquaintances, and some lasting friendships.

In the regiment, "the Colonel's lady" was very popular, and beyond it in the town and county, "Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald" was much beloved and esteemed.

Gertrude and Gerald frequently visited and received visits from their friends in Wilde County, and in the first years of their residence our little lady turned match-maker, and promoted two marriages among four desolate elderly people that turned out very happily for all concerned. The first was the marriage of the good old rector of Red Sandstone Parish with Miss Sue Greenleaf, who made a most excellent and popular minister's wife, and added much to the comfort and cheerfulness of the rectory.

The second marriage was that of Mr. Benjamin Bowers, who, finding that Miss Maxima Rowley was to enjoy a life-interest in the Manor House and revenues of Hill Top, formally proposed to that lady, and was accepted, because she had never recovered from the taunt cast in her teeth by old Jess, to the effect that she would live and die an old maid, for that there was not a man in the world as poor and miserable as to marry her even for her money—a taunt that she disproved by becoming the wife of Mr. Benjamin Bowers, whose sanguine temperament and convivial habits had rather a happy effect than otherwise, on her morose temper and austere manners.

After all that, Miss Maxima Rowley, or rather Mrs. Benjamin Bowers, forgave Gertrude for being, young, lovely and beloved, and she ever received our little lady cordially at her house.

There were yet two other marriages in the family, not of Gertrude's promotion, but still very gratifying to her feelings.

The first of these was the wedding of Miss Fitzgerald with her German prince, which came off in Midsummer at the house of the American minister in Berlin. And this union was all the more pleasing to the Fitzgeralds, because the immense wealth of the bridegroom enabled the newly-married pair to dispense very easily with the manor Geraldine had lost. Whether she was perfectly happy in her marriage no one ever knew; but she had wealth, rank, and a splendid career, and if these could not make Geraldine happy, nothing could. Besides, she had a very phlegmatic philosopher for a husband, who, whenever she fell into one of her furious passions, would most likely light his pipe, and walk quietly into his library, if the season were winter, or into his garden, if it were summer, and smoke until the storm should be passed.

But the most delightful of all the weddings, to Ger trude's mind, was that of her beloved cousins, Sallust Rowley and Patricia Fitzgerald, which had been set for the golden days of Indian summer, late in the month of October.

Having had half a year's warning, our generous little lady had ordered from Paris a wedding outfit for the bride quite worthy of a princess.

Colonel Fitzgerald presented the jewels.

The marriage ceremony was to be performed at St. Patrick's Church, and at Gerald and Gertrude's earnest request the wedding reception and banquet was to be held at the Summit Manor House.

On the first of October Colonel Fitzgerald got a month's leave, and accompanied by Gertrude, went to the Summit that they might take their places as host and hostess for the occasion.

On the nineteenth of the same month, Sallust Rowley and Patricia Fitzgerald were married at St. Patrick's Church, in the presence of a very large company, Father

Dubarry performing the ceremony, and Colonel Fitzgerald giving away the bride.

Immediately after the ceremony, the bride and bridegroom with their attendants and their guests, entered the waiting carriages and proceeded to the Summit Manor House, where they were entertained at breakfast by Colonel and Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald.

In the afternoon of the same day, Mr. and Mrs. Sallust Rowley left for Wildeville, where they took the evening stage-coach for Washington, whence they went on to Baltimore to embark for Europe; not on an ocean steamer by any means, but on the staunch old merchant ship, the *Becky*, George Wailes, master, bound from Baltimore to Liverpool, with a cargo of tobacco, rice and cotton.

They were the only cabin passengers, and Captain Wailes had fitted up the after-cabin in elegant bridal state to do them honour.

They spent a year in Europe, and then returned and settled down on Sallust Rowley's estate, where, in due course of time, a promising family of girls and boys gathered around them.

Mr. Royal Greenleaf never married, but enjoyed a happy bachelor life at Greenwood, solaced by the company of his favourite and widowed sister, Mrs. Doy Fitzgerald.

To return to Gerald and Gertrude. On the day after the departure of Sallust and Patricia for the wedding tour; an event happened that threw a full light on a mystery in the past that had never been quite cleared up to their satisfaction.

Gerald and Gertrude had often wondered what was the exact nature of the communication made by the mad woman called Magdala to the dying Maurice Fitzgerald, which had been so powerful as to precipitate his death. That it related to the unhappy exile, Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, they had no doubt; but what was it? And above all, what was the object she had drawn from her bosom and presented to him, and the sight of which had thrown him into the fatal convulsion that terminated in his death? They could never conjecture; but on the day succeeding Sallust and Patricia's wedding they were fated to know.

On the morning of the 20th of October, the sexton of St. Patrick's Church went into the building to clear it up, after the great wedding.

He was surprised to see the door of the vault, under the altar, standing wide open, an unprecedented occurrence at any other time than at a funeral.

Being at once a faithful and a fearless old man, the sexton struck a light and descended into the open vault.

There, to his extreme horror, he found the dead body of the mad woman known as Magdala, stretched across the coffin of Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald.

Brave old man as he was, the sexton fled at the sight, and hastened into the adjoining priest's house to inform Father Dubarry.

The good priest, very much shocked at the news, hurried into the church, and down into the vault, where he also, to his amazement, recognized in the dead body of the woman lying across Arthur Fitzgerald's coffin, all that was mortal of the poor mad wanderer, Magdala, or the gipsy Clea Phara.

He sent one messenger off in haste to the Summit Manor House for Colonel Fitzgerald, and another to Wildeville for Dr. Peter Shaw. In due time both these gentlemen arrived.

The body of Magdala was lifted out of the vault and laid on some pew-cushions in the chancel, and then the doctor made an examination and pronounced the death to have resulted from purely natural causes, and gave a certificate to that effect.

It happened, however, that in the course of his investigations the doctor had taken from the bosom of the woman a small roll of paper. which he immediately handed to Colonel Fitzgerald, and which the latter opened and found to contain a newspaper cut representing the portrait of a man, beneath which was printed—ADAM LACKLAND, THE MURDERER.

And under these words were scrawled in pencil:

Alias Arthur Lloyd Fitzgerald, the heir of the Summit Manor.

Colonel Fitzgerald saw at once that this must have been the likeness Magdala had shown to Maurice Fitzgerald, who had recognized in the condemned man his

eldest brother's son, and whose fears of discovery and dishonour had caused his death.

Colonel Fitzgerald crumpled the paper up and destroyed it instantly.

Then, armed with the doctor's certificate of the death, he gave orders for the funeral of Magdala, or Clea Phara, whose body was thereupon removed to the priest's house to be prepared for burial, and afterwards interred in the churchyard of old St. Patrick's.

To none but Gertrude did Gerald Fitzgerald ever tell what was found in the bosom of the dead gipsy's dress; and then she too understood the cause of the shock which had hastened the death of old Maurice Fitzgerald.

One more incident and I have done. I relate this only because it is so strongly illustrative.

It was on All Hallow Eve, the last day of October, and the last of their stay at the Summit Manor. Colonel Fitzgerald's leave having expired, they were to return to Wendover the next morning, the first of November.

They had just finished breakfast, but had not left the table, when Jubal entered with the mail-bag which Colonel Fitzgerald took from him and unlocked.

It contained the Washington, Richmond, and New York papers, besides several letters from friends; that is, one each from Sallust and Patricia, written on the eve of sailing for Europe, one from Captain Wailes, and one from Lieutenant Wesley of the regiment. Some of these were read aloud by Gertrude, and others by Gerald for their mutual benefit.

But the last letter was from Washington, with an official stamp.

This Colonel Fitzgerald opened and read in silence, with a grave face, that grew graver as he proceeded.

Gertrude looked at him with uneasiness, but forbore to ask questions, waiting until he should finish his letter when, perhaps, he would explain.

At length he folded it, and said:

"They have ordered me to the frontier, Gertrude! to my old quarters at Fort Terror, where I spent so many long years of my youth."

She turned pale and caught her breath as she looked at him, but she did not speak.

He left his place, and came around the table and seated himself beside her, saying:

"Shall I go, sweetheart? Or, shall I resign my commission?"

"What do honour and duty bid you do, Gerald?" she inquired, after a pause, and in a very low voice.

"Honour and duty are silent and neutral on this subject, dear Gertrude, else I should not have asked the question, or hesitated an instant. I have served my country long enough, and hard enough, to have earned the right to resign and retire now."

"Do you wish to go, Gerald?" she asked, in a very soft voice.

"No, dear; not at all," he answered, very frankly.

"Do they need you?"

"Yes. I am not their best officer, or even their best soldier, but I have been many years in that country, and so I am the best for that post in the present crisis."

"Then go, dear Gerald, and take me with you."

"What, Gertrude! Shall we leave this lovely climate and this luxurious home, and our hosts of friends, to go a long and labourious journey to a savage and solitary frontier post, to meet privations, hardships, perils, such as you have never dreamed of?" he said, being resolved to put the case very plainly before her.

"Yes, Gerald, *we* will go; for you will go because you are needed there, and I will go because I will not be left behind. Only in this shall I be wilful, dear Gerald, in staying with you; for I will not—*I will not* —I WILL NOT be parted from you again," said the little lady, emphatically.

"And you shall not, little wife. In this you shall be as despotic as you please," he answered.

"Anything, anything but parting, Gerald! Oh, how I suffered in my long severance from you! Dear Gerald, is there anything in this world worth parting for?"

He replied with a gentle caress.

"We shall never part, my wife."

And they never did.

So, in brief, they went with the regiment to the far Western frontier, in the expectation of spending at least five years in that savage solitude, but fate was kinder to them.

After eighteen months of hard service, when the refractory Indians were reduced to order, and peace was permanently secured to that part of the country, the regiment was recalled, and they all came home.

The colonel received his well-earned promotion, and then, indeed, Brigadier-General Fitzgerald felt that he could with honour resign his commission and retire into the repose of domestic life.

His resignation was reluctantly accepted, and then with his little lady, he returned to the Summit Manor House.

They lived there surrounded by loving and adoring friends and neighbours, doing more good and enjoying more happiness than usually falls to the lot of human beings.

They have many lovely children—among them is a little Gabriel, who is as dark and handsome as his father, and a little Lily, who is as fair as her flower namesake, and has hair which is "silver in the sunshine and golden in the shade."

And, finally—the "girl's heart" has long since found perfect peace in her husband's perfect love.

FINIS.

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